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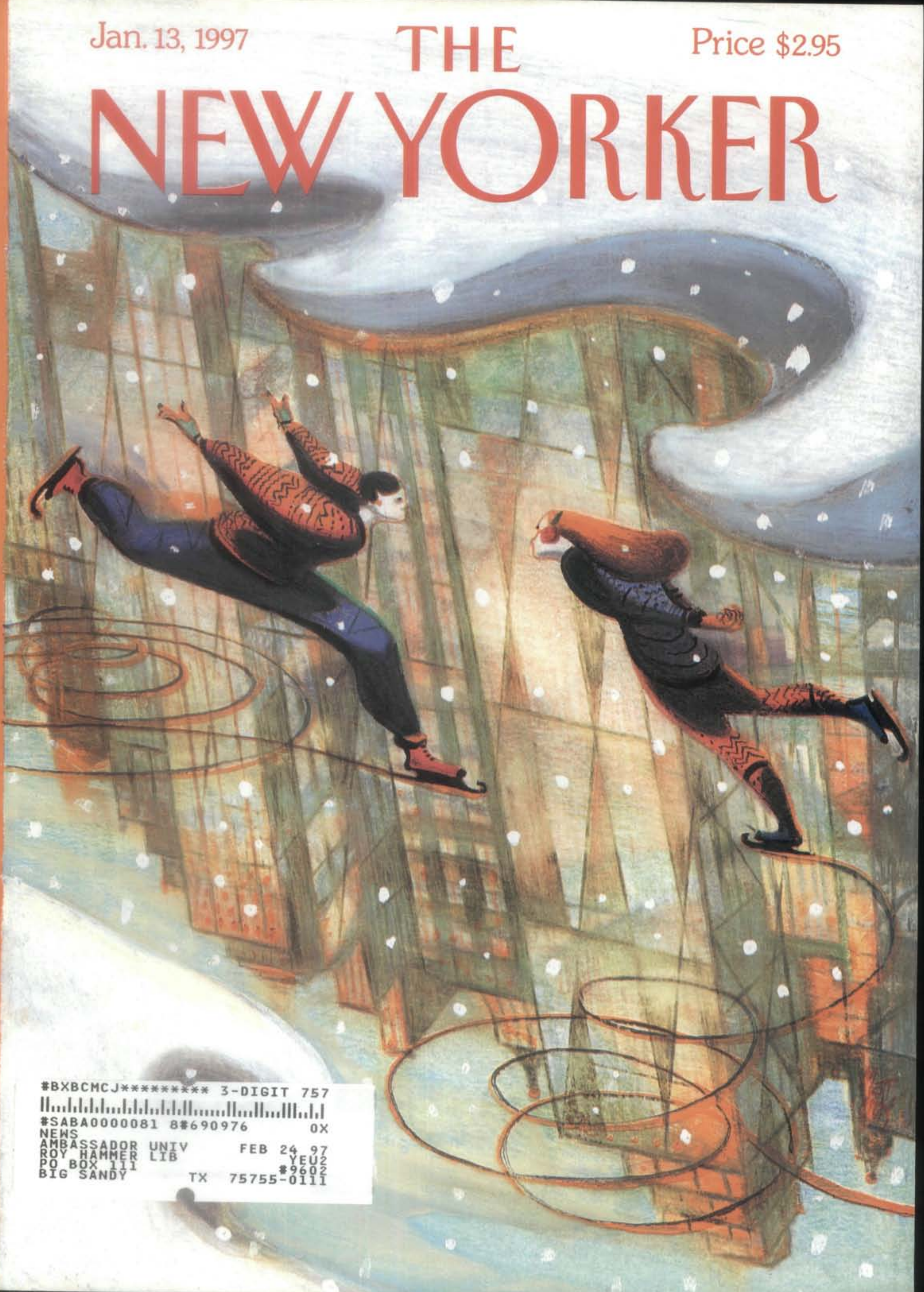

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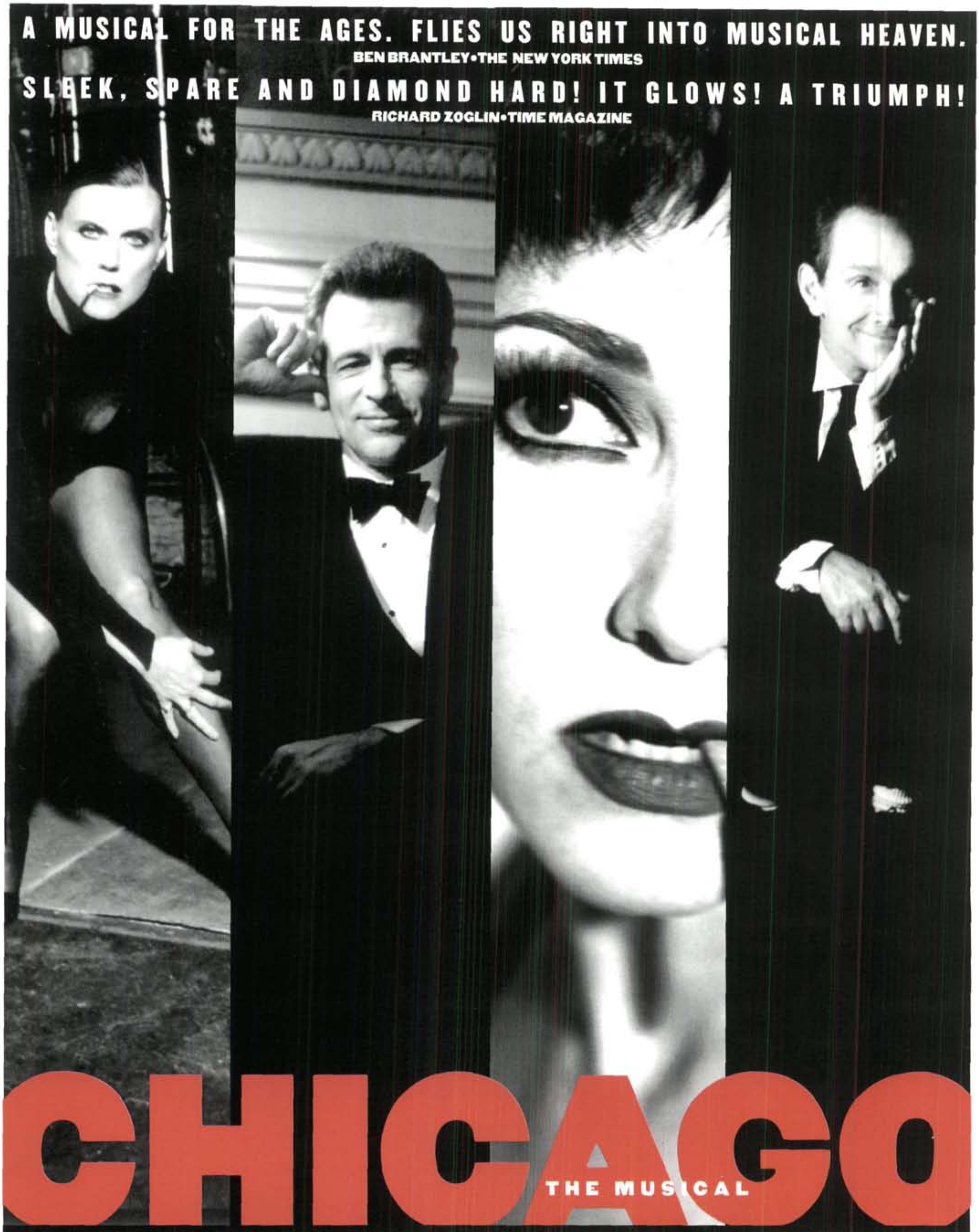

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THE NEW YORKER

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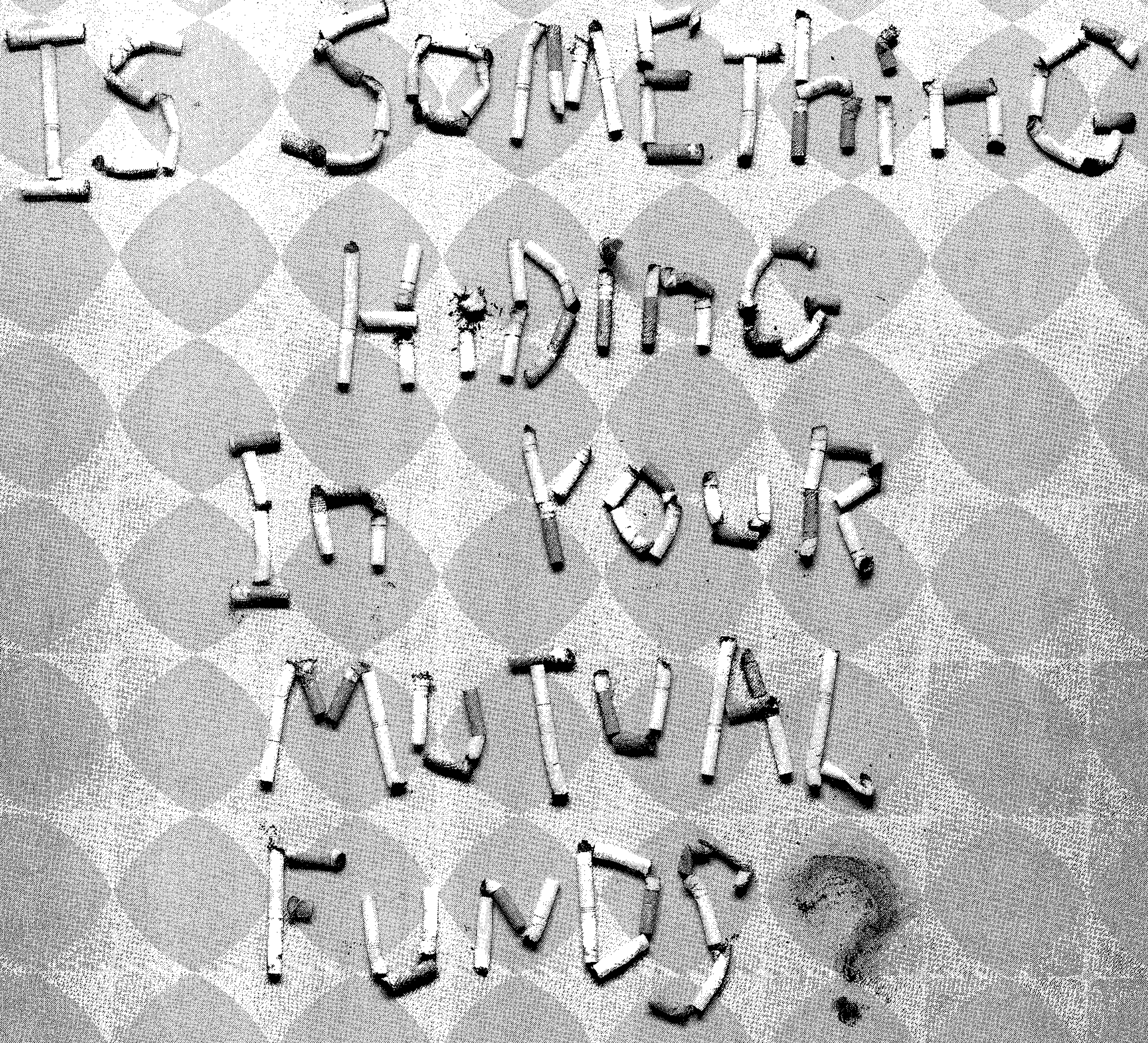

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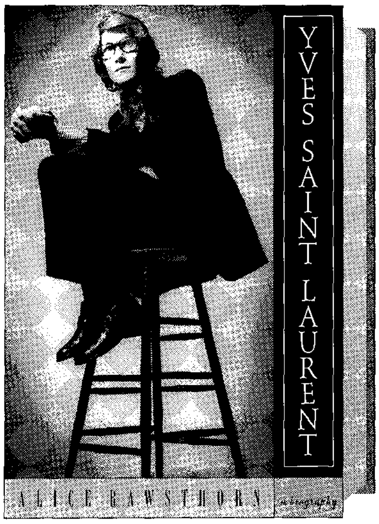

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COMMENT

JOHNNY BE GOOD

Ebonics and the language of cultural separatism.

THE school board of Oakland, California, can feel good about one thing: it has enabled Chuck D and William Bennett to find common ground. This is not an everyday occurrence. When these men are of one mind on an issue, it is safe to assume that consensus has been reached. The issue, of course, is Ebonics, which the Oakland school board announced last month to be the "primary language" of African-Americans, thereby providing the nation's newspapers with manna in what is normally a barren season. Between December 20th, two days after the board passed its resolution, and January 2nd, the *Times* ran seven news stories, one editorial, one column, two Op-Ed pieces, and three letters to the editor on the subject—fourteen items in thirteen days.

Even people who couldn't care less what either Mr. D or Mr. B thinks about anything, let alone whether they think alike, seem inclined to agree on this one. For Ebonics is, indeed, an unfortunate idea pretty much any way you look at it. It associates language with skin color (the name, as everyone now knows, is an amalgam of "ebony" and "phonics"), it smacks of cultural separatism, and it standardizes a pattern of speech that is regarded as purely colloquial even by most of the people who use it. The board's announcement, Jesse Jackson was quick to complain, made Oakland into the "laughingstock of the nation." It dressed up in the rhetoric of defiance what looked for all the world like an admission of defeat.

On December 24th, following a meeting with Jackson (who has a knack for entering as a conciliator controversies he himself has helped stir up), Oakland school officials began frantically to backpedal. The board was not, officials explained, proposing either to teach Ebonics or to teach *in* Ebonics—despite having directed the Oakland school superintendent, in its original resolution, to "devise and implement the best possible academic program for imparting instruction to African-American students in their primary language for the combined purposes of maintaining the legitimacy and richness of such language . . . and to facilitate their acquisition and mastery of English language skills." Nor was it trolling for state or federal funds intended for bilingual education—despite having concluded that "the English language acquisition and improvement skills of African-American students are as fundamental as is application of bilingual education principles for others whose primary languages are other than English." And it was not as-

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serting a biological basis for Ebonics—despite having stated that Ebonics is "genetically based and not a dialect of English." The board's intention, it was now explained, was simply "to provide teachers with the tools to better understand students' language patterns so that a bridge can be built toward helping them read, write, and speak proficiently in standard American language."

The notion that some African-American children have difficulty learning to read and write because they're habituated to nonstandard language patterns is not new. It was once, in fact, the finding of a federal court, in a famous case in Michigan in 1979; and today eighteen school districts in California, including Oakland's, participate in something called the Standard English Proficiency Program, which is designed to help specifically African-American students. African-Americans score lower than any other group on the verbal portion of the Scholastic Assessment Test, and no one disputes that some African-American children have trouble learning to read and write. People do dispute whether so-called "African-American" speech patterns are responsible for this trouble—it may, for example, have more to do with a lack of emphasis on reading at home—but you would have to be a social Darwinist not to be in favor of devoting particular attention and resources to making sure that inner-city African-American children acquire proficiency in standard English language skills.

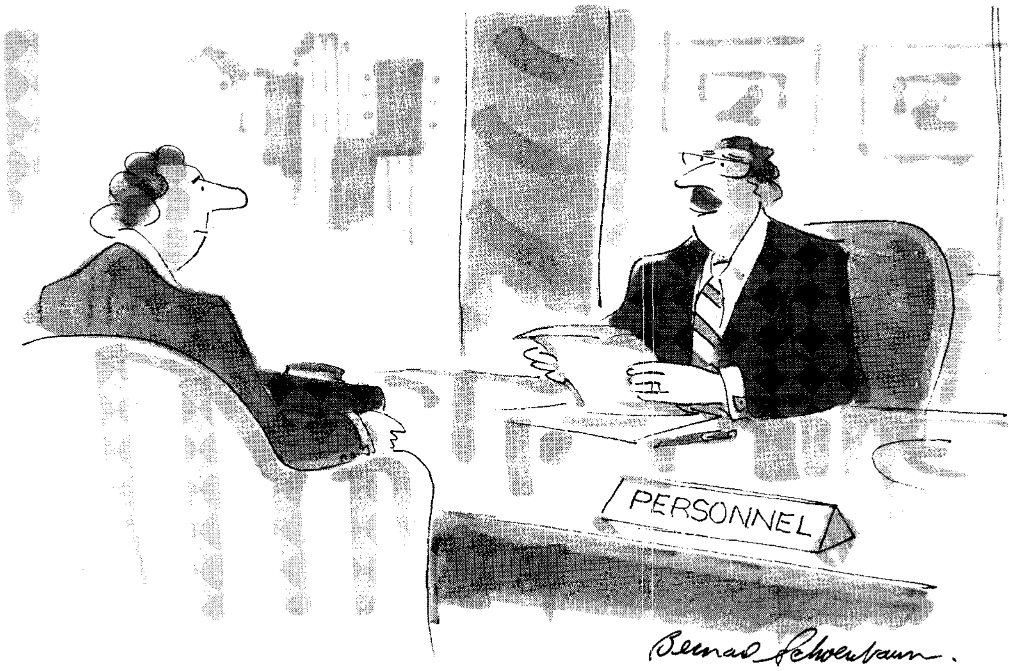
Thanks in part to the exertions of Jackson, this has now become the issue in the Oakland matter—just as the issue in the Texaco matter earlier last fall switched from being whether Texaco officials had used racist expressions to being whether minorities were adequately represented in leadership positions within corporate America. But special attention to African-American schoolchildren is not what people were so exercised about a couple of weeks ago.

The initial resolution of the Oakland school board was a reminder that linguistics has often been as much ideology as science. The Ebonics debate (if it was a debate) reminded some people of the debate (and that *was* a debate) over what was called Black English back in the sixties. But Black English was a response, in turn, to another view of the speech patterns of African-Americans, and the differences between the theories are telling. Linguists once claimed that African-American speech—which is said to include such features as dropping the verb "to be" and the possessive "s," and using "be" to indicate a habitual condition, as in "Johnny be good," meaning "Johnny is a good person"—was merely old Southern-white speech that had failed to change. The Black English thesis of the sixties was that those speech patterns constituted a distinctive dialect, derived not from white speech but from a pidgin spoken in the slave trade. The theory of Ebonics, which arose among scholars in the mid-seventies, is that African-American speech is a language whose origins are West African.

It's easy to see, in each case, how politics march right alongside the "scientific" conclusions. The notion that African-Americans speak an underdeveloped form of the speech of Southern whites who emigrated from England connotes racial condescension; the notion that they speak an independent dialect connotes racial pride; and the notion that they speak a distinct language connotes cultural separateness. Everything seems to turn on which explanation you prefer.

But nothing turns on it. The thesis that something useful can be learned about people from the origins of the way they talk is a myth. It makes not the slightest difference whether the colloquial speech of twentieth-century inner-city African-Americans is traceable to the speech of eighteenth-century English immigrants, to slave-boat pidgin, or to West African languages. The belief that it does make a difference belongs to the belief that "cultures" are discrete possessions of discrete groups—things whose "legitimacy and richness" (in the words of the Oakland school board) require official recognition and protection. Those words may seem the most sympathetic ones in the board's resolution—it must be good, people feel, to recognize all subcultures as equally worthy—but they are really the saddest. Multiculturalism, of the strident sort that the Oakland board has espoused, is no favor to American subcultures. In the short run, it may enliven everyone's appreciation of the variety of American styles, but in the long run it can only turn that variety into mainstream mush. Diversity has been an official mantra for several years; even Bob Dole recited it. But a whole society cannot think "It's good to be diverse" and actually *be* diverse at the same time. Subcultures flourish when they are just part of life, not part of the curriculum. When they acquire official patronage, they're on the way to the museum.

—Louis Menand



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IN THE MAIL

DEFENDING THE POPE

In Garry Wills's review "All the Pope's Men" (December 2nd), he comments on the Pope's "weird position" that women cannot be priests and that priests cannot be married. But the nature of the Catholic Church's insistence on a male clergy is quite different from the nature of its insistence on a celibate clergy. The former is indeed based in large part on the historical given that the original apostles were men, and on the claim that ontological implications flow from this fact. The latter, however, is fully recognized by the Catholic Church as admitting of cultural and historical developments. The celibacy of the priesthood is part of the canon law in the Western Church, but the Catholic Church has always recognized the validity of the Eastern Church's long-standing practice of allowing married priests. The Pope's position has a much deeper historical and theological acuity than Mr. Wills suggests.

SCOTT BRENON CATON
Assistant Professor of History
Roberts Wesleyan College
Rochester, N.Y.

HISTORIC LUNCHEON

As a French-speaking G.I. stationed in Paris after V-E Day and awaiting my discharge, I heard a story about the French resistance to the German occupation that illustrates Adam Gopnik's line in "A Tale of Two Cafés" (Paris Journal, December 2nd) on the century-old coexistence of the Café de Flore and the Café aux Deux Magots: "History keeps wiping the table off and asking you, a little impatiently, what you'll have now." During lunch in the busy Deux Magots café, so the story goes, Louis Aragon asked a waiter to take a note to his friend Jacques Prévert, who was seated at another table. On the paper, Aragon had drawn a tombstone with a swastika on it. When the note was returned, Prévert had printed under the tombstone the slogan that the Nazis were then plastering across France to persuade the French to accept their fate as a granary for Germany: "*Le retour à la terre.*"

JOHN DARR
New York City

PRO AND ECON

John Cassidy's critique of modern economics ("The Decline of Economics," December 2nd) ignores the fact that the natural tool for thinking carefully about complex systems of interacting units is mathematics, and that this is why theoretical economics has, in the last fifty years, become quite mathematical. Cassidy complains that "many economists are involved in intellectual pursuits that have little to do with the social issues dominating the newspaper headlines," and reports that the senior economist at A.T. & T. complains that academic economics "is nothing like as useful to the business community as it could be." Neither of these complaints is germane. How long would Einstein have lasted in the research department of the telephone company? I do not disvalue the application of economic theory to the improvement of human welfare, but one should judge the value of a science or an art by its best contributions, not by its mediocre ones.

JOHN E. ROEMER
Director, Program on Economy, Justice & Society
University of California
Davis, Calif.

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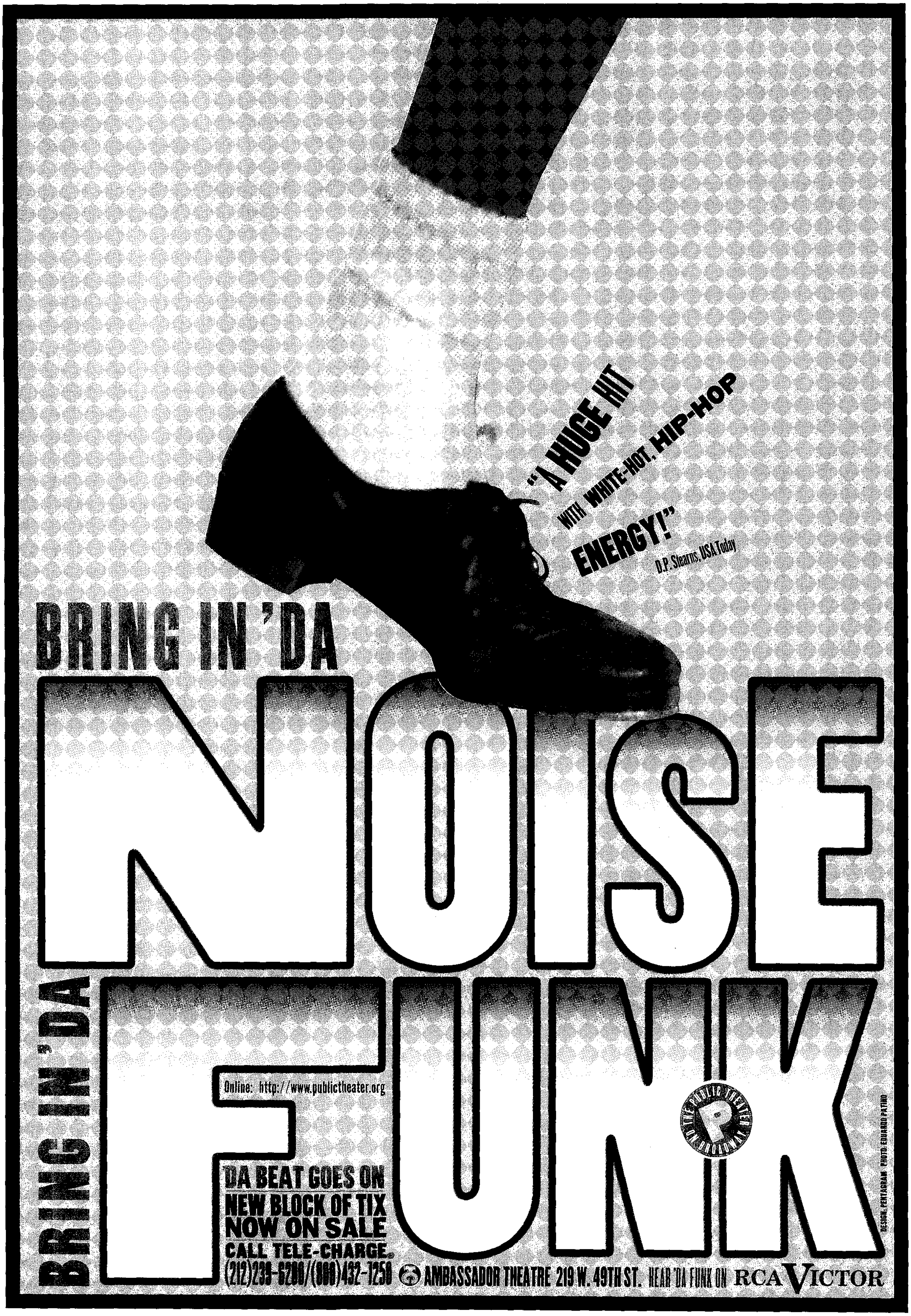

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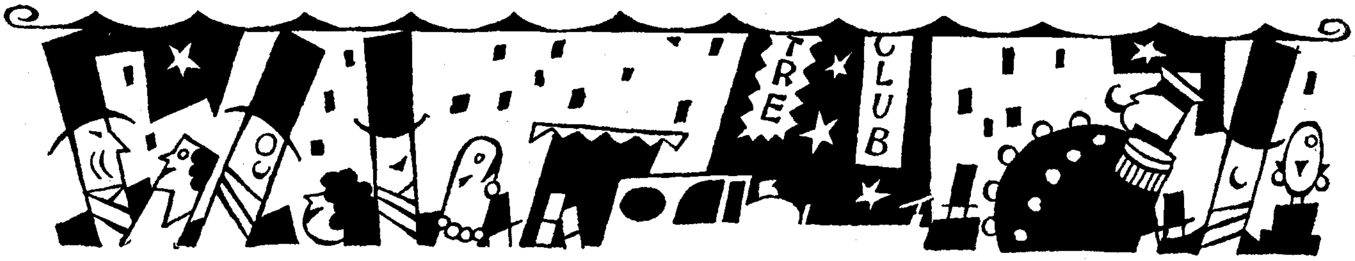

THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

(Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.)

Curiouser and Curiouser—The National Theatre of the Deaf uses a combination of American Sign Language and spoken dialogue to present a play adapted by Larry Arrick from Lewis Carroll's "Alice" books. Jan. 10 at 8 and Jan. 11 at 2:30 and 8. (Kaye Playhouse, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 68th St. 772-4448.)

The Pirates of Penzance—A production of the New York Gilbert & Sullivan Players. Jan. 9-10 at 8, Jan. 11 at 3 and 8, and Jan. 12 at 3. Continues through Jan. 19. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 864-5400.)

The Red Address—A businessman's public persona belies the circumstances of his passionate private life, in a psychological drama written by David Ives and starring Kevin Anderson. In previews. (Second Stage, Broadway at 76th St. 873-6103.)

Scapin—Bill Irwin and Mark O'Donnell's adaptation of Molière's comedy "The Rogueries of Scapin," directed by and starring Mr. Irwin. Two previews on Jan. 8. Opens Jan. 9 at 7. (Roundabout, Broadway at 45th St. 869-8400.)

Second-Hand Smoke—In his latest play, Mac Wellman ruminates on the state of America at the end of the twentieth century. The cast includes Joanna Adler, David Greenspan, and Kristine Nielsen. In previews. (Primary Stages, 354 W. 45th St. 333-4052.)

South—The playwright, novelist, and essayist Julian Green's 1953 drama, about a Polish military officer's visit to a Carolina plantation, is set on the night before the outbreak of the War Between the States. A Target Margin Theatre staging. In previews through Jan. 11. Opens Jan. 12 at 7 and continues through Feb. 2. (HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 647-0202.)

The Two Gentlemen of Verona—Theatre for a New Audience joins forces with Shakespeare's Globe, London, to present the Globe's staging of the comedy. The cast includes Mark Rylance, Anastasia Hille, Matthew Scurfield, Jim Bywater, Lennie James, and Stephanie Roth. Previews through Jan. 11. Opens Jan. 12 at 7 and continues through Jan. 26. (New Victory, 209 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

OPENED RECENTLY

The Barber of Seville—Michael Feingold's new translation of Beaumarchais's comedy, in a Pearl Theatre Company production. (80 St. Marks Pl. 598-9802. Closes Jan. 18.)

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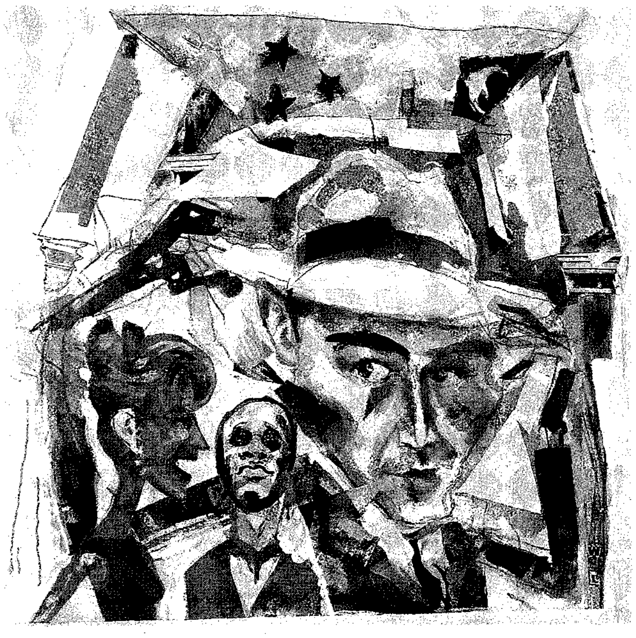
Beat: A Subway Cop's Comedy—John DiResta, New York City transit policeman and standup comic, files a report on his subterranean workplace. (Kaufman, 534 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

A Brief History of White Music—A comic revue by Dee Dee Thomas and David Tweedy, in which an all-black cast interprets the music of Sonny and Cher, the Beach Boys, the Beatles, and other honkies. (Village Gate, 240 W. 52nd St. 239-6200.)

Chicago—The long-legged Ann Reinking is the ingénue Roxie Hart, a role she played at one point in the original 1975 production; Bebe Neuwirth is streamlined and sardonic as her man-killer sidekick; and the angular chorus line, in skimpy black, is as stunning and hard-edged as Bob Fosse's dances. Walter Bobbie's bookless, setless revival of the Kander-Ebb-Fosse extravaganza of cynicism (choreographed by Reinking this time around) has enough razzle-dazzle and flashes of lucid sarcasm to set the audience cheering almost from the start. The story is about a woman who gets away with murder; this pared-down concert posing as a full-dress musical may do the same. (Reviewed in our issue of 11/25/96.) (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100.)



Anastasia Hille, Lennie James, and Mark Rylance, in "The Two Gentlemen of Verona."

WARREN LINN

Cloud Tectonics—José Rivera's new play is a fairy-tale romance, set in Los Angeles during a torrential rainstorm, in which a pregnant woman searches for the father of her child. Directed by Tina Landau. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

Family Values—A sex comedy by the Canadian playwright Carl Ritchie. Ed (Joel Fabiani) is a blustery podiatrist who longs for the days when his ex-wife (Ellen Evans) would rub his feet for hours on end; he also wishes that his son weren't, as he puts it, a "fruit," and that his daughter weren't "boinking" her boyfriend. Daniel Ettinger's set, an apartment awash in chintz, is much more tasteful than the sitcomlike proceedings. (Irish Arts Center, 553 W. 51st St. 358-5174.)

Flipping My Wig—Charles Busch drags in the New Year with a new one-woman revue. With music by Dick Gallagher and Rusty Magee and lyrics by Mr. Busch. (WPA, 519 W. 23rd St. 206-0523. Closes Jan. 26.)

Forbidden Broadway Strikes Back!—Gerard Alessandrini cuts a satirical swath through the Great White Way in the latest edition of his musical parody. (Triad, 158 W. 72nd St. 799-4599.)

Full Gallop—The legendary, vividly eccentric fashion editor Diana Vreeland is the subject of Mary Louise Wilson and Mark Hampton's one-woman play, in which Wilson stars. Set in 1971, shortly after Vreeland was fired from *Vogue,* it's rich and resonant, with much to say about life that's worth hearing. A thoroughly satisfying evening in the theatre—very funny and very moving. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.)

Howard Crabtree's When Pigs Fly—The exuberant designer Howard Crabtree died last June, and this revue of witty, satiric songs (created with and written and directed by Mark Waldrop, and sung by a talented cast dressed in Crabtree's sequinned, feathered, mind-boggling costumes) is a fitting cap to his career. (Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change—In made-for-musical-theatre voices, the appealing cast of Joe DiPietro and Jimmy Roberts's crowd-pleasing revue about love and marriage sings songs examining made-for-musical-theatre issues. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.)

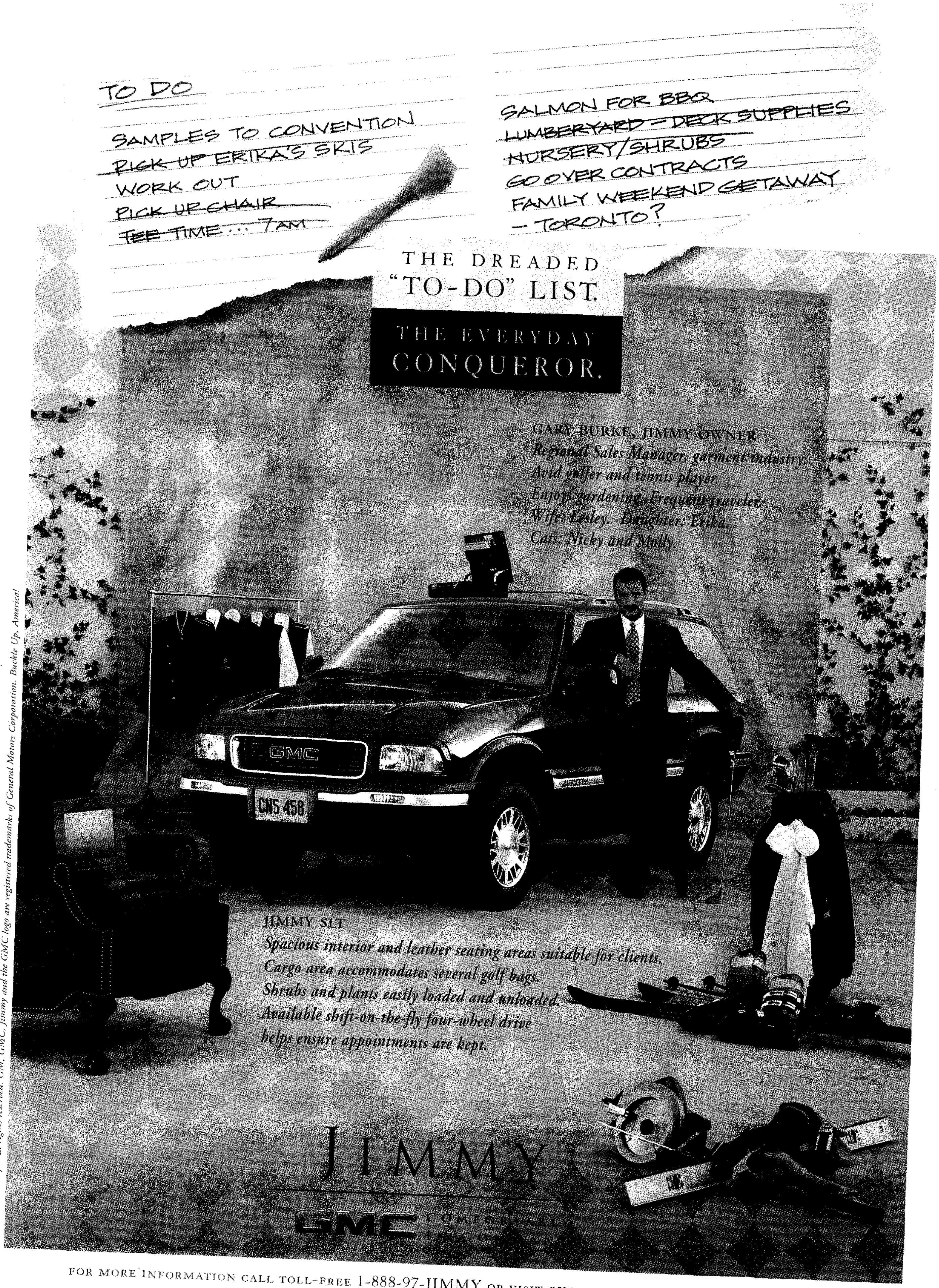
Jean Cocteau Repertory—Presenting Aphra Behn's Restoration comedy "The Lucky Chance." (Bouwerie Lane Theatre, 330 Bowery, at Bond St. 677-0060.)

Joseph Gabriel: Magic on Broadway—Mr. Gabriel has performed at the Las Vegas Flamingo Hilton for the past ten years, and his feats are certainly impressive, but it's all too clear from the trappings of his act—dancers in polka-dotted boxer shorts, a sequinned Elvis—that he hasn't left Nevada behind. (Lamb's, 130 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

June Moon—The Drama Dept. presents George S. Kaufman and Ring Lardner's 1929 musical comedy about a Tin Pan Alley songwriter, starring Cynthia Nixon, Becky Ann Baker, Albert Macklin, and Robert Joy. Mark Nelson is the director. (Ohio Theatre, 66 Wooster St. 629-4656. Closes Jan. 19.)

Late Nite Catechism—Maripat Donovan offers a commandingly funny performance as the lone nun in charge of an adult catechism class, and the audience brings as much to the performance as the script does. (St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 279-4200.)

The Maiden of Ludmir—The Folksbiene Playhouse presents a new Yiddish musical by Miriam Hoffman (book and lyrics) and John Clifton (music), based on the life of the



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THE JOYCE IS JUMPING: *Seven companies, including Dance by Neil Greenberg (Neil, left), Neta Pulvermacher & Dancers (Neta, behind him), and Complexions (Dwight Rhoden and Desmond Richardson, right), land in the Altogether Different festival, which continues at the theatre through January 26.*

MARC ROYCE

nineteenth-century female Torah scholar. Simultaneous English or Russian translation is available. (123 E. 55th St. 755-2231. Closes Jan. 12.)

Neat—Charlayne Woodard's new one-woman show, a memoir of growing up in the sixties, is a companion to her "Pretty Fire," which she performed here in 1993. Directed by Tazewell Thompson. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

Nine Armenians—Leslie Ayvazian's play is a well-worn American-immigrant tale, complete with kids who don't care about the past until a climactic revival of tradition which brings everyone together, but it's humorously told and superbly acted by a cast that includes Michael Countryman, Sophie Hayden, and Kathleen Chalfant. Lynne Meadow directed. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Closes Jan. 12.)

No Way to Treat a Lady—The York Theatre Company begins an all-musical season—its first ever—with a comedy-thriller based on the William Goldman novel of the same title, about a detective in pursuit of an actor turned murderer. Book, music, and lyrics by Douglas J. Cohen. (Theatre at St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 935-5820. Closes Jan. 19.)

Old Wicked Songs—Jon Marans' well-written piece of sentimental sanctimony asks the question: Can a blocked, arrogant twenty-five-year-old pianist (Justin Kirk) find wisdom under the tutelage of a suicidal singing teacher (Hal Robinson) who survived the Holocaust? (The answer is yes.) (9/16/96) (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 580-1313.)

Once Upon a Mattress—Gerald Gutierrez directs Sarah Jessica Parker in a revival of the 1959 musical, based on "The Princess and the Pea." (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

Paved Paradise—Dance Theatre Workshop presents performance artist John Kelly's solo musical work, a paean to Joni Mitchell, through Jan. 11. (219 W. 19th St. 924-0077.)

Permanent Brain Damage (Risk It! Risk It!)—The latest musings on human consciousness from Richard Foreman and his Ontological-Hysteric Theatre. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 533-4650.)

Present Laughter—As the monumentally egotistical West End star Garry Essendine, Frank Langella keeps the core of Noël Coward's 1939 comedy of bad manners alive with a full-tilt assault on the character's outrageousness. Unfortunately, the director, Scott Elliott, seems to think that he's liberating Coward by turning the play into a bisexual romp. But he orchestrates some delicious farce moments, and the supporting players are funny even when Elliott is leading them down blind alleys. (11/25/96) (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

The Rehearsal—If you have a yen to see a bunch of disparate acting styles on stage at the same time, this production of Jean Anouilh's 1963 farce is for you. Nicholas Martin's rather loosey-goosey direction ends up making a porridge of the play, when a glittering crystal is what's wanted. Though nothing can destroy Anouilh's cleverness, it's frustrating to watch such good actors as Frances Conroy and Roger Rees at anything less than their best. The cast includes David Threlfall and Kathryn Meisle; Jeremy Sams did the translation. (Roundabout, Broadway at 45th St. 869-8400. Closes Jan. 10.)

Repertorio Español—Performances of "El Aplauso Va por Dentro" ("The Applause from Within"), a new play by Mónica Montañés, starring the Venezuelan actress Mimí Lazo as a divorcée who puts herself through a punishing exercise regime in order to regain her youthful appearance, run in repertory with "El Cano" ("The Blond Man"), Louis Delgado's drama about an ambitious Puerto Rican who allows his boss to believe he is Italian, and "La Gringa," Carmen Rivera's comedy about a woman's first trip to Puerto Rico to meet her relatives. Most performances are in Spanish, with simultaneous English translation available. (Gramercy Arts Theatre, 138 E. 27th St. 889-2850.)

Tooth of Crime (Second Dance)—Continuing its Sam Shepard season, the Signature Theatre Company has given the author's rewritten version of his 1972 play a striking, absorbing production that includes beautifully performed and very cool new music by T Bone Burnett. Vincent D'Onofrio, as Hoss, the fading rock star fighting to stay at the top of the heap, gives a finely tuned performance that tricks you into embracing Crow, his creepy-confident usurper (played with vicious glee by Kirk Acevedo), with the same bored fickleness that allows our jaded culture to discard the barely old for anything new. Shepard's rewrite is half-hearted, though; it makes you wonder why he'd give in to a similar urge to throw over the fine original—and whether he hasn't lost touch with the American landscape he once so deftly reimagined. Bill Hart is the director. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 239-6200.)

LONG RUNS

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST: Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4100. . . . **BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES:** Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370. . . . **BRING IN DA NOISE, BRING IN DA FUNK:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 239-6200. . . . **CATS:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE FANTASTICKS:** Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838. . . . **A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE FORUM:** St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **GRANDMA SYLVIA'S FUNERAL:** SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 691-1555. . . . **GREASE!:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200. . . . **AN IDEAL HUSBAND:** Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE KING AND I:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100. . . . **LES MISÉRABLES:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **MISS SAIGON:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200. . . . **PERFECT CRIME:** Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401. . . . **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA:** Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **RENT:** Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000. . . . **SMOKEY JOE'S CAFÉ:** Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200. . . . **STOMP:** Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at St. Marks Pl. 477-2477. . . . **SUNSET BOULEVARD:** Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 307-4007. . . . **TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING:** St. John's Church, 81 Christopher St. 279-4200. . . . **VICTOR/VICTORIA:** Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100.

DANCE

New York City Ballet—Jan. 8 at 8: "Correlazione," "Duo Concertant," "Reliquary," and "Brahms-Schoenberg Quartet." . . . ¶ Jan. 9 at 8: "Ballo della Regina," "Symphony in Three Movements," and "The Concert." . . . ¶ Jan. 10 at 8: "Correlazione," "The Cage," "Other Dances," and "Symphony in Three Movements." . . . ¶ Jan. 11 at 2: "Ballo della Regina," "Kammermusik No. 2," "Sonatine," and "Brahms-Schoenberg Quartet." . . . ¶ Jan. 11 at 8: "Concerto Barocco," "The Cage," "Other Dances," and "Brahms-Schoenberg Quartet." . . . ¶ Jan. 12 at 3: "Swan Lake," "Reliquary," "Duo Concertant," and "The Concert." . . . ¶ Jan. 14 at 8: "Reliquary," "Duo Concertant," "Kammermusik No. 2," and "Brahms-Schoenberg Quartet." (New York State Theatre. 870-5570. The season continues through March 2.)

"Altogether Different"—Three weeks of performances by seven contemporary-dance companies, with programs that, in every case, include a première and at least one seasoned work. Jan. 7 and Jan. 9-10 at 8: **COMPLEXIONS,** in "Gravel," "Fractal Boundaries," "Blue Nectar," and "Cake." . . . ¶ Jan. 8 at 8 and Jan. 12 at 2 and 7:30: **SHAPIRO AND SMITH DANCE,** in "Never Enough," "What Dark/Falling Into Light," and an untitled duet danced by the choreographers. . . . ¶ Jan. 11 at 8: **DANCE BY NEIL GREENBERG,** with the choreographer performing his solo from "Not-About-AIDS-Dance," and the company joining him for "The Disco Project" and "Part Three (My Fair Lady)." . . . ¶ Jan. 14 at 8: **ZVI GOTHEINER & DANCERS,** in "Oh, Moon of Alabama," "Lash," and "6 Solos by Men to Scarlatti." (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. Through Jan. 26.)

Kipos—The choreographers Daniel Tai and Aspassia Yaga and their six-member company, Kipos, present three repertory works, "The Breakdown of Talks," "Knife Dance," and "The Dreamer," and the première of "After the Gasp," set to the percussion of Glen Velez and Handance, who will follow the dance performance with a set of their own. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194. Jan. 9-12 at 8:30.)

NIGHT LIFE

CONCERTS

DAVID BOWIE—A fiftieth-birthday party for the Thin White Duke (actually, his birthday is the previous day, but the Knicks are playing). Bowie hasn't had a truly influential record since "Scary Monsters," in 1980, or a top-ten hit since "Let's Dance," in 1983, and a year after the release of "Outside," his twenty-fourth album, he's nowhere to be found on Billboard's Top Two Hundred list. But his awesome back catalogue still serves as a wellspring for bands like Suede, Oasis, Pulp, Blur, and Spacehog, and for all the other young dudes who were weaned on "The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars." His forthcoming record, "Earthling," finds him exploring—with surprising success—the high-speed, frenetically percussive genre known as jungle. For this august occasion, Bowie is joined by a cabinet of modern-rock notables: Frank Black, who for years was the twisted leader of the Pixies; the Foo Fighters, fronted by former Nirvana drummer Dave Grohl; Lou Reed, still the world's greatest monotonic rock singer; the ever-powerful Sonic Youth; and the Cure's leader, Robert Smith, he of the smudged red lipstick and the bird's-nest coif. Opening is the gender-bending rock act Placebo. (Madison Square Garden. 307-7171. Jan. 9 at 8.)

LOUIE BELLSON AND HIS BIG BAND—With his double bass drums thumping and his thousand-volt exuberance charging up the bandstand, Bellson may be the last big-band leader to call up the days when musicianship went hand in hand with showmanship. He still looks and sounds great as he informs his ensembles with invaluable knowledge learned firsthand from his onetime employer, Duke Ellington. (Pace Downtown Theatre, Spruce St. between Nassau and Gold Sts. 346-1715. Jan. 9 at 8.)

THE HERBIE NICHOLS PROJECT—Nichols, who died in 1963, was an iconoclastic pianist and composer whose posthumous fame keeps increasing. This group, made up of members of the Jazz Composers Collective (see Visiones), includes Ted Nash, Ron Horton, Frank Kimbrough, and Ben Allison; they will be joined by the resourceful drummer Matt Wilson. (Museum of Modern Art Auditorium, 11 W. 53rd St. 995-1552. Jan. 10 at 5:30.)

NEW EDITION—This R. & B. supergroup reunites former teen idols Bobby Brown (now married to Whitney Houston) and Ricky Bell, Michael Bivins, and Ronnie DeVoe (who became the now defunct Bell Biv DeVoe). Though the band was originally admired for its clean-cut, Jackson Five-esque innocence, its members' adult swagger has turned them into one very formidable posse. With Blackstreet and Keith Sweat. (Madison Square Garden. 307-7171. Jan. 10 at 8.)

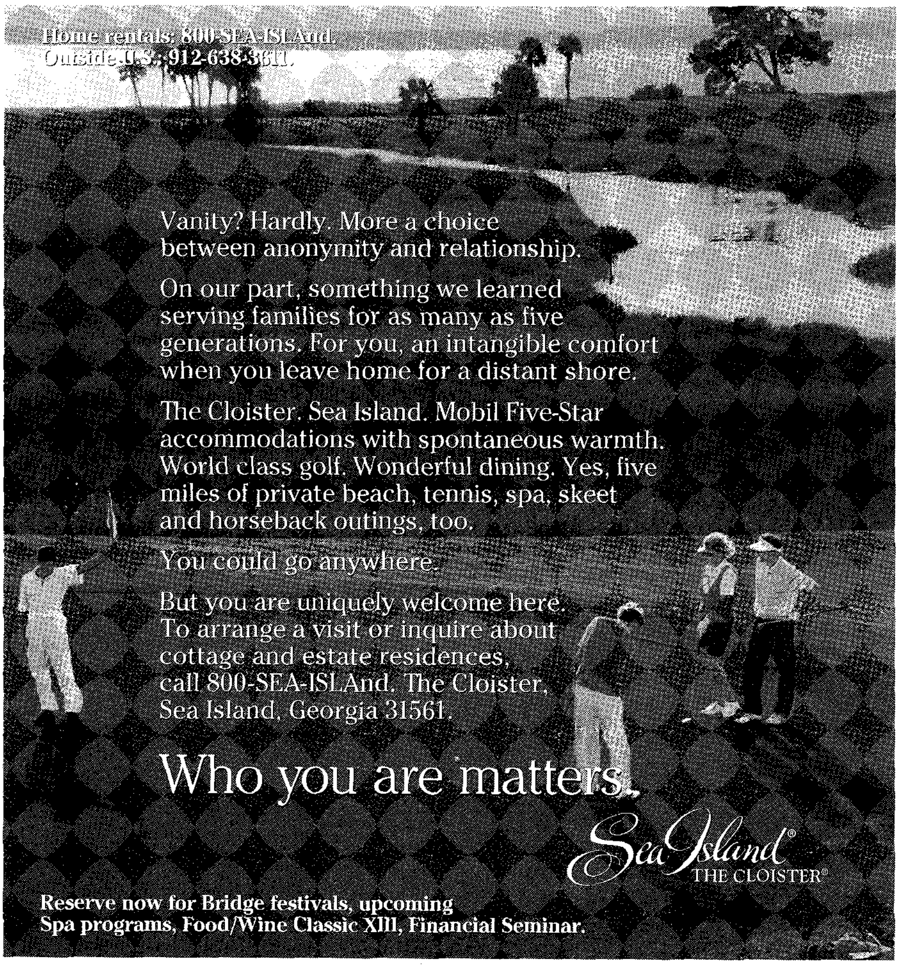
WANG GUOWEI—A former soloist with the Shanghai Traditional Orchestra, the musician presents a program devoted to the *erhu*, a two-stringed fiddle. (Washington Square Church, 135 W. 4th St. 545-7536. Jan. 10 at 8.)

BILLY STRITCH AND CLAIBORNE CARY—The pianist and singer Stritch trades warmth and wit with vocalist-actress Cary. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100. Jan. 11 at 7:30 and 10.)

LAVENDER LIGHT—The lesbian-and-gay gospel choir. (Tribeca Performing Arts Center, 199 Chambers St. 346-8510. Jan. 11 at 8.)

ALHAMBRA—The vocal-and-instrumental ensemble presents Sephardic music from Spain, North Africa, the Balkans, and Turkey. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. Jan. 11 at 8.)

TRICKY—This mysterious British rapper, writer, and producer (his real name is Adrian Thaws) is well on his way to having the worst reputation in the record business—no mean feat. He's stormed out of concerts after a few minutes, failed to show up for others. Nevertheless, he remains one of the most adventurous musicians working today. Most of his material is built around slow, sexy beats and found sounds—plinking keyboard loops, metallic guitars, industrial grind, etc. The



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results are dense and soulful, soothing but also vaguely disturbing. His astounding solo début, "Maxinquaye," was a hip-hop bellwether; his recent work, particularly a telling project called "Nearly God," has been hit-or-miss. With the postmodern rap act Jeru the Damaja. (Irving Plaza, 17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. 777-6800. Jan. 11-12 at 10.)

Beck—Some eight years ago, eighteen-year-old Beck Hansen stepped off a Greyhound bus at Port Authority and headed straight for the Lower East Side; he's come a long way. Back then, the Angeleno high-school dropout was already reconfiguring folk with punk attitude and X-Acto-knife wit. These days, he's shaken the slacker-dude persona ("I'm a loser, baby, so why don't you kill me?"); he's no slacker, and no loser, either. On "Odelay," his near-genius followup to "Mellow Gold," he deconstructs folk, punk, rock, and hip-hop with startling results. (Roseland, 239 W. 52nd St. 307-7171. Jan. 12 at 5.)

Jazz at Merkin Hall—An installment of the Key Players series, spotlighting pianists Marian McPartland and Donald Brown and bassist Christian McBride. (129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. Jan. 13 at 8.)

CLUBS

(A highly arbitrary listing, in which boldface type indicates some of the more notable performers in town. Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it is always advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.)

Bottom Line, 15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—Decent sight lines, great greasy food, prodigiously talented waitresses, and a consistent roster of high-quality acts. Jan. 10: An evening called "Bluebird Style," part of the Writers in the Round series, features **richard barone, jules shear,** and guests.

Duplex, 61 Christopher St., at Seventh Ave. S. (255-5438)—Everyone is a star here—the pianist, the bartender, the waiters, and the audience. The fabulous **dressing room divas** entertain every Saturday night.

Fez, 380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—A comfortable neo-Moroccan bar hidden inside the Time Café. The downstairs room, where bands perform, is a fine spot to take in a show. Jan. 14: **martin sexton.** The **mingus big band** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

The Greatest Bar on Earth, 1 World Trade Center (524-7000)—Hyperbole, perhaps, but it's certainly the highest. And Thursdays through Saturdays you'll find live music, dancing, and dining, a hundred and seven stories above the city. Jan. 9-11: Lounge and swing grooves from **beat positive.**

Manny's Car Wash, 1558 Third Ave., at 87th St. (369-2583)—The Upper East Side blues. Jan. 8: Chicago-via-Mississippi guitarist **byther smith.** Jan. 9-10: Detroit fretman **larry mc cray.** Jan. 11: The **christine santelli** blues band.

Maxwell's, 1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-798-4064)—Jan. 11: The **upper crust,** a Boston-based band whose shtick is powdered wigs, tight knickers, and English accents. According to the principal singer, Lord Rockingham (the other members are Jackie Kickassis, Marquis Mark, Le Duc D'istortion, and Lord Bendover), the impetus behind it was boredom: "We like to think of ourselves as five wealthy aristocrats who are trying to learn how to rock. Actually, we're really just five misfits in eighteenth-century glam."

Mercury Lounge, 217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—Jan. 8: Canadian popsters the **odds.** Jan. 9: **dump.** Jan. 10: **babe the blue ox,** a ferocious little trio that's sort of a cross between King Crimson and Primus. Jan. 11: **very pleasant neighbor,** a fine local act that suggests XTC with a Ritalin prescription. Jan. 13: **pull my daisy.**

Paddy Reilly's Music Bar, 519 Second Ave., at 29th St. (686-1210)—**black 47** plays on Saturdays, and Speir Mor (Gaelic for "big sky") performs for a hearty following on Fridays.

Les Poulets, 16 W. 22nd St. (229-2000)—The name may be French, but the music here is Latin: expect salsa, merengue, and the occasional cha-cha. This week, two nights of salsa: **ray sepulveda,** on Jan. 10, and **johnny ray,** on Jan. 11. Dining.

S.O.B.'s, 204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (243-4940)—A great grass hut with a fruit-and-bamboo motif, dedicated to calypso, reggae, and the bossa nova. Dining.

Tramps, 51 W. 21st St. (727-7788)—Jan. 11: **little buster and the soul brothers.** With the Cleftones.

Wetlands, 161 Hudson St. (966-4225)—Just in from Burlington, Vermont, **strangefolk** lights up this vast environmentally friendly club on Jan. 11.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Algonquin Hotel, 59 W. 44th St. (840-6800)—Guitarist and vocalist **john pizzarelli's** impudent goofiness brings a fresh breeze to the stuffy old Oak Room this month. An agile musician and a pleasant low-key crooner from the Chet Baker/Alfalfa school, he is solidly backed by Ray Kennedy on piano and his brother, Martin, on bass, making this the best-sounding cabaret act in town. Dining.

Arthur's Tavern, 57 Grove St. (675-6879)—Mondays belong to the Grove Street Stompers, Tuesdays through Thursdays to Al Bundy and Johnny Parker, Fridays and Saturdays to the Freddy Francis trio, and Sundays to Lee Lorenz and the Creole Cookin' Jazz Band.

Birdland, 315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—The legendary club has a new address and bigger digs, and Charlie Parker's name still shines proudly on the awning and on the banner behind the stage. The black-and-white photographs of jazz greats are for sale, so you can really savor the memories. Jan. 8: Vocalist **mark murphy.** Jan. 9-11: Altoist **lee konitz,**

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pianist **DON FRIEDMAN**, and guitarist **ATILLA ZOLLER**. Konitz's place in the history books was already assured, but Friedman and Zoller had yet to be properly recognized for their longstanding lyrical gifts until the trio's bracing album, "Thingin'," turned out to be the sleeper of 1996. Jan. 12: The **DAVE STRYKER** quartet. Jan. 13: The **LENI STERN** trio. Jan. 14-16: Alto player **BOBBY WATSON**, with **HORIZON**. Dining.

TABLES FOR TWO

HONMURA AN, 170 Mercer St. (334-5253)—In Japan, folks stop by their local *sobaya* for a dish of plump buckwheat soba noodles the way New Yorkers pick up a slice. And, like pizza, soba inspires fierce loyalties and intense emotions. Honmura An, which is affiliated with a seventy-five-year-old *sobaya* in Tokyo of the same name, makes its noodles on the premises, in a little glass-enclosed teakwood temple in the corner of the dining room; the staff even grinds the wheat there, using traditional millstones. The restaurant's discreet (indeed, almost imperceptible) street entrance opens onto a stairway that leads up to a spacious room finished in teak, decorated only with luminous sheets of rice paper hanging from dowels and a few fabulous ceramic things.

Soba is the focus of the meal, of course, and, like everything Japanese, it is agreeably draped in ritual. The noodles are served in lacquerware boxes, with a dipping sauce; after you've polished them off (visiting Japanese businessmen have been observed going through three or four boxfuls), the waiter brings out a pitcher of the noodle-cooking broth, which you add to the dipping sauce to make a wholesome, bone-warming soup.

The restaurant also offers divine tempura (Koichi Kobari, the owner, has giant prawns flown in from the Tsukiji fish market in Tokyo) and a delicately flavored sushi roll that substitutes soba noodles for rice. But ask if there's a sashimi special: on one recent visit it comprised dainty slices of yellowtail tuna, scallops that tasted too sweet to have come from the sea, and a generous mound of pale golden sea urchin, so cirrus-light and fluffy that it almost floated up off the dish. (Open for lunch Wednesdays through Saturdays, for dinner Tuesdays through Sundays. Entrées $14-$28.)

BLUE NOTE, 131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Jazz, mirrors, and a gift shop. Through Jan. 12: Start the year off right with a visit to **DR. JOHN**, whose gruff, back-porch take on R. & B. has been much imitated but never matched. Since this house call is at a pricey jazz outpost, expect more serious piano work and a little less howling at the moon. Starting Jan. 14: Japan's premier saxophonist, **SADAO WATANABE**, and his quartet share a bill with **MONTY ALEXANDER**, Jamaica's foremost jazz pianist, and his trio. Both musicians know their stuff, but each relies far too much on virtuosity to prove his authenticity. Dining.

CARLYLE HOTEL, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound pastel murals, and, for a two-month stint, the amazing **EARTHA KITT**. She is still a fierce and funny performer with a feral grip on her audience. At the end of a song she'll throw back her head and laugh, like some kind of carnivore after the kill; she chooses her victims from the front row, and when the show is over there's blood on the tables. . . . ¶ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, pianist **PETER MINTUN** embarks on a fifteen-week jaunt starting Jan. 14.

FIFTY SEVEN FIFTY SEVEN, 57 E. 57th St. (758-5757)—A cool, sumptuous piano-and-bass room in the Four Seasons Hotel, with twenty-two-foot-high ceilings, a long backlit bar stocked with single-malt Scotch, and fine jazz seven nights a week. Dining.

IRIDIUM, 44 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Through Jan. 12: The **GATO BARBIERI** quintet. The Argentinean tenor saxophonist has a sensuous tone and a résumé that includes everything from avant-garde work in the sixties to composing the score for "Last Tango in Paris." Starting Jan. 14: The **ELLIS MARSALIS** trio. Marsalis—Big Daddy himself—is a model of pianistic decorum. The family name hasn't exactly been a drawback, but this elegant and supple stylist isn't riding on anybody's coattails. Dining.

KNICKERBOCKER, 33 University Pl., at 9th St. (228-8490)—An Old New York kind of place, with dark wood panelling, white tablecloths, and brass figurine lamps.

KNITTING FACTORY, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Jan. 8-12: Various permutations of **ANTHONY BRAXTON'S** jazz ensemble. Jan. 14: The *nuevo tango* of the late Astor Piazzolla, performed by pianists **EMANUEL AX** and **PABLO ZIEGLER**.

MAXIM'S, 680 Madison Ave. (751-5111)—In 1985, Pierre Cardin spent millions to open this mock-nineteenth-century bistro, which features stained glass, bevelled mirrors, and inlaid ceilings. But the eighties ended, and the club went dark for five years. A new management has revamped the menu, lowered the prices, and "done away with the dress code." Dining.

RAINBOW & STARS, 30 Rockefeller Plaza (632-5000)—A plush, old-fashioned night club, sixty-five floors above it all, complete with Art Deco fixtures, intimate glitter, and a panoramic view as dizzying as the tab. Jan. 8-14: **"LEADING MEN DON'T DANCE"** an evening with four Broadway and television performers: George Dvorsky, Scott Holmes, Richard Muenz, and Byron Nease. . . . ¶ Across the hall, in the Rainbow Room, there's a revolving dance floor, plus swinging big-band music courtesy of the Rainbow Room Orchestra, featuring vocalists Sean Mahony and Claudette Sierra. Closed Mondays.

RASPUTIN, 2670 Coney Island Ave., at Ave. X (718-332-8111)—With a bottle of vodka on your table and a bellyful of blini, you can't help but be affected by this Sheepshead Bay supper club's powerful moods, which alternate between Old World nostalgia (blind-sidingly sad Russian ballads) and New World celebration (Vegas-style burlesque). The show is equal parts Ziegfeld, Fellini, and Michael Jackson; when it's over, you're likely to find yourself on the dance floor with the rest of the done-up clientele, boogieing like a fool to the wedding-band rock.

SMALLS, 183 W. 10th St. (929-7565)—This aptly named club features up-and-coming players jamming late into the night. Jan. 9: The **PETER BERNSTEIN** quartet. Having just scored a dream gig—as a new addition to Joshua Redman's band—guitarist Bernstein must be sitting pretty. On this rare night off, he gets to show off his sound—it's like Grant Green hot-wired for the nineties—and his genuine feel for the blues. Jan. 10-11: The **DAVID GLASSER** quartet. Jan. 14: The **JOHN REGAN** trio. Stocked to the gills with exciting new players, the **JASON LINDNER BIG BAND** now holds court every Monday.

SWEET BASIL, 88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (242-1785)—A convivial and crowded jazz club where the musicians are always top-shelf. Through Jan. 12: The **LOUIS HAYES** group. Hayes doesn't get the press that some of his peers routinely garner, but he remains one of the greatest hard-bop drummers. With experience as the rhythmic muscle for Cannonball Adderley and Oscar Peterson, he knows how to keep a band solid and swinging. Starting Jan. 14: The **CECIL MC BEE** quartet.

From the horse's mouth

A COMPLETELY UNSOLICITED testimonial appeared recently in A La Carte, the definitive mouthpiece of food and wine.

It was penned by Raymond Gardner and it concerned *"...the superbly mellow Macallan from Craigellachie in Banffshire, aged in sherry casks, a mellow miracle and to my mind the most sophisticated of the commonly-available Highland malts..."*

If that is what the pundits think, perhaps it is time to let your own mouthpiece pronounce on the subject.

The MACALLAN
12

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THE SINGLE MALT SCOTCH.

THE MACALLAN Scotch Whisky. 43% alc./vol. Sole U.S. importer Rémy Amerique, Inc., New York, N.Y. THE MACALLAN is a registered trademark of Macallan-Glenlivet P.L.C.
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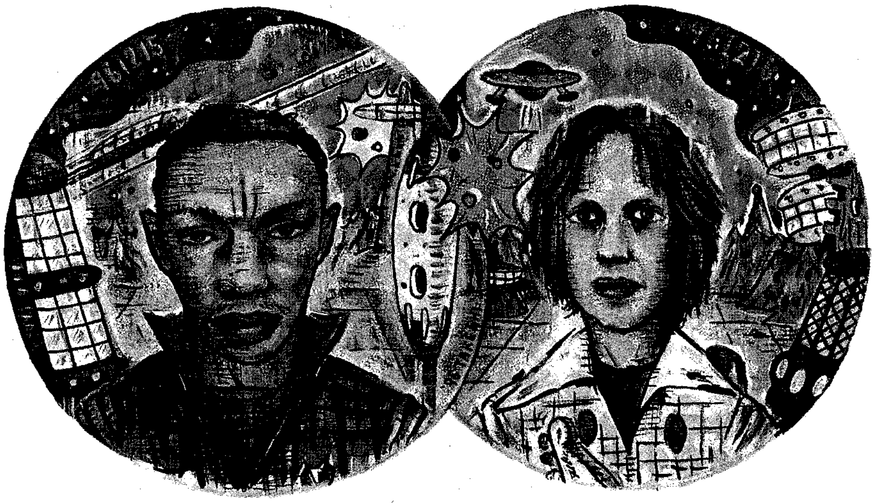
Bassist McBee's fingers could probably crack open walnuts. Now in his fourth decade as an A-list sideman, he also knows how to assemble his own first-rate bands, drawing on the myriad musicians he's played with over the years. These days, virtuosity is a given for bass players, but experiencing one of the masters at work can give the word new meaning. Dining.

Tavern on the Green, Central Park W. at 67th St. (873-3200)—This legendary tourist haven makes serious jazz fans welcome in the Chestnut Room, which resembles a hunting lodge and is every bit as over-the-top as the rest of the establishment. Jan. 8-12: **DARYL SHERMAN** sings and plays piano, accompanied by Dan Barrett on trombone and Boots Malleson on bass. Starting Jan. 14: **FREDDY COLE** is just *so* smooth. His voice floats across the room like vapor, and his touch transforms lightly turned piano phrases into aural gossamer. Unforgettable himself, Freddy's done his older brother proud. Dining.

Village Gate, 240 W. 52nd St. (307-5252)—Through Jan. 11: Possessed of the most mellifluous tone, fluid phrasing, and effortless swing of any clarinettist since Benny Goodman, **KEN PEPLOWSKI** is also an impressive in-the-tradition tenor saxophonist. On his recent disk, "The Other Portrait," the eclectic Peplowski dips into the classical repertoire, but this gig should be pure—and exhilarating—mainstream jazz. Starting Jan. 14: The **ROY GERSON** quartet. Dining.

Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—The world's most famous jazz club is also the last place in town that still looks, smells, and feels like a classic jazz club—subterranean, smoky, and thick with the spirits of past masters. Through Jan. 12: Altoist **JACKIE MC LEAN,** with the **CEDAR WALTON** trio. Starting Jan. 14: Saxophonist **LOU DONALDSON** performs with **DR. LONNIE SMITH** on the organ, **PETER BERNSTEIN** (see Smalls) on guitar, and **FUKUSHI TAINAKA** on drums. The **VANGUARD JAZZ ORCHESTRA** holds sway on Mondays.



One-name wonders: Tricky and Beck (see Concerts).

TAKESHI TADATSU

Visiones, 125 Macdougal St., at W. 3rd St. (673-5576)—A tiny, low-key supper club where the jazz, like the Spanish-American cuisine, can take on a spicy, multicultural flavor. Jan. 8-11: The **TED NASH** quintet. At least, that's the label they're appearing under for this gig, which probably means that the saxophonist's compositions will be featured, but the group actually comprises the core of the Jazz Composers Collective. But hey, what's in a name—particularly when such excellent players as pianist Frank Kimbrough and bassist Ben Allison are involved? The **MARIA SCHNEIDER ORCHESTRA** is now in its second year of Monday nights here; the composer and arranger's big band has settled nicely into institutional status.

Zinno, 126 W. 13th St. (924-5182)—A rarity among jazz clubs: somewhere you'd go to eat even if there were no music. Jan. 8-11: Guitarist **GENE BERTONCINI** and bassist **MICHAEL MOORE.** Jan. 13-14: **MOORE, KEN PEPLOWSKI** (clarinet—see the Village Gate), and **HOWARD ALDEN** (guitar).

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—The largest exhibition of the art of Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot mounted in more than a hundred years poses this question: Was the most celebrated landscape painter of the nineteenth century the visionary precursor of Impressionism or the last, decadent exponent of neo-Classicism? It's a model exhibition, refreshing in its candor (it almost seems designed to take the artist down a peg), and there is certainly a wealth of beautiful paintings to beguile the visitor. Among the most seductive works are the snapshot-like oil sketches of the Roman Campagna and the studies of Italian peasants painted during the artist's first visit to Rome, in the eighteen-twenties. The great Salon paintings on Biblical subjects, particularly the luminous "Hagar in the Wilderness," are as impressive now as they must have been when first exhibited. Yet by the time you reach the late idealized landscapes that lonely goatherd on the dim riverbank is beginning to look awfully familiar. Through Jan. 19. . . . ¶ "Eugène Cuvelier, Photographer in the Circle of Corot," an exhibit of salted-paper prints from the eighteen-fifties and -sixties. Through Jan. 12. . . . ¶ The cynosure of a large exhibition surveying the career of the Scottish architect and designer Charles Rennie Mackintosh (1868-1928) must certainly be the restored Ladies' Luncheon Room from Miss Cranston's Ingram Street Tea Rooms, in Glasgow. Through Feb. 16. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:15, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—The Jasper Johns retrospective features two hundred and twenty-five works—paintings, drawings, prints, and sculptures—and naturally includes a few flags, targets, numerals, and cross-hatch patterns. Through Jan. 21. . . . ¶ Denise Marika's installation, "More Weight," features a video loop of nude figures projected onto a large rectangular metallic structure with layers of pink felt in the center. Through Jan. 26. . . . ¶ "New Photography 12" features work by Richard Billingham, Thomas Demand, Osamu Kanemura, Sophie Ristelhueber, Georgina Starr, and Wolfgang Tillmans. Through Feb. 4. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, 11 to 6; Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 8:30.)

Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—"Ellsworth Kelly," a large survey of the artist's paintings, sculptures, works on paper, and photographs. Through Jan. 19. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 10 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 10 to 8.)

Guggenheim Museum SoHo, 575 Broadway, at Prince St. (423-3500)—"The Hugo Boss Prize: 1996." The Guggenheim clearly had Britain's prestigious Turner Prize in mind when it established this award, named for the German menswear designer, and there can be no denying the merit of the inaugural-year short list: Laurie Anderson, Janine Antoni, Matthew Barney, Cai Guo Qiang, Stan Douglas, and Yasumasa Morimura. The artists were judged on the basis of their work as a whole, rather than on the strength of their installations here. That's a good thing for Barney, the winner, who bothered to submit only a few stills and props from his splendid video "Cremaster 1." In the show, however, Antoni comes off best, with "Slumber," a complex piece including a bed in which the artist sleeps each night, an electroencephalograph that records her brain-wave activity, and a loom on which she weaves her EEG patterns into a blanket: a compelling rereading of the myth of Penelope. The effect is riveting. Through Jan. 19. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Saturday evenings until 8.)

Whitney Museum of American Art, Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—"Making Mischief," an excellent exhibition chronicling the Dada invasion of New York, from the Great War through the early twenties. Chief among its attractions is a significant selection of pieces by Marcel Duchamp, including a painstaking reconstruction (recently made by Swedish scholars) of his masterpiece "The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even," also known as the "Large Glass." As often happens at the Whitney, some American artists have been shoehorned into an exhibit they have no business in. Still, the material is fascinating and very well presented. Louise and Walter Arensberg's salon has been reconstructed with a full-size photographic mural and many of the original paintings (by Cézanne, Duchamp, Braque, and others) hanging in their proper places. Through Feb. 23. (Open Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8.)

American Museum of Natural History, Central Park W. at 79th St. (769-5100)—The renovated Hall of Vertebrate Origins is open, its dropped ceiling removed to reveal Calvert Vaux's skylit design. All the better to see the dunkleosteus, a sixteen-foot-long hanging model of an armored fish, based on the four-foot-long fossil of its head, with self-sharpening jawbones. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

Brooklyn Museum, Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—The museum's extensive Chinese collection has handsome new quarters in which a careful, lucid presentation offers a broad look at the art of the Middle Kingdom, from Neolithic stone carvings to blue-and-white ceramics of the late Ch'ing dynasty. . . . ¶ "In the Light of Italy: Corot and Early Open-Air Painting," an exhibition of oil sketches which makes a marvellous pendant to the big Corot show at the Met. Long before the advent of Impressionism, plein-air painting was an arena for experimentation. The often very small pictures in this show, all from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, were produced by an international cadre of artists drawn to the antiquities and landscape of Rome and its environs. Through Jan. 12. . . . ¶ "The Evidence of Things Not Seen: Drawings by Glenn Ligon." Through Jan. 19. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

American Craft Museum, 40 W. 53rd St. (956-3535)—A mid-career survey of glazed ceramic, bronze, and mixed-medium works by Michael Lucero. Through Feb. 16. (Open daily, except Mondays, 10 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 8.)

Asia Society, Park Ave. at 70th St. (517-2742)—"Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions." The best work in this superb show manages to avoid mimicking the vernacular of Western modernism and postmodernism by drawing upon traditional forms. "Lingga-

Yoni," an assemblage by the Indonesian sculptor Nindityo Adipurnomo, takes the Hindu icon of the male and female sex organs and neatly flips it, encasing a delicately decorated lingam in a rough box representing the yoni. N. N. Rimzon's crudely rendered image of a Jain deity menaced by massive swords makes its statement with unapologetic simplicity. Through Feb. 2. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 8; Sundays, noon to 5.)

Dia Center for the Arts, 548 W. 22nd St. (989-5912)—"A Place Called Abroad," a remarkable installation by the Spanish artist Juan Muñoz, whose work could be characterized as George Segal meets Michael Asher: the implicit expressionism of the anguished human figure, ominously frozen, is perversely wedded to a deconstructivist architectural critique. . . . ¶ Minimalist sculptures, of the barely visible variety, by Fred Sandback. (Open Thursdays through Sundays, noon to 6.)

Fashion Institute of Technology, Seventh Ave. at 27th St. (760-7760)—"From Printed Line to Woven Flower," an exhibition devoted to the Institute's textile holdings. The cornerstone of the collection is an extensive bank of swatches (silk ribbons, flannel pajamas, cotton bandannas, featherwork passementerie, bobbin and needle lace, etc.), an aide-mémoire to help designers design. To further speed the process, several thousand patterns from the archive have been filed in a CAD (computer-aided-design) CD-ROM system; visitors can browse through the onscreen catalogue of plaids, paisleys, herringbones, and so on. Through Jan. 11. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, noon to 8, and Saturdays, 10 to 5.)

Jewish Museum, Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (423-3200)—"From Court Jews to the Rothschilds: Art, Patronage, and Power, 1600-1800." Through Jan. 19. (Open Sundays through Thursdays, 11 to 5:45, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

The New Museum, 583 Broadway, between Houston and Prince Sts. (219-1222)—"Up To and Including Her Limits." Carolee Schneemann, an important precursor of the body-art movement, is the focus of this small but well-mounted retrospective, which ranges from early, funky assemblages incorporating broken mirrors and dead birds to photomontages and videos that document such major performance pieces as the infamous "Meat Joy." Performed in 1964, "Meat Joy" had a cast of nine men and women who stripped down and writhed ecstatically as they pelted one another with mackerels, plucked chickens, and hot dogs, and rubbed them against their naked bodies as they painted themselves. Through Jan. 26. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, noon to 6; Saturday evenings until 8, with no admission charge after 6.)

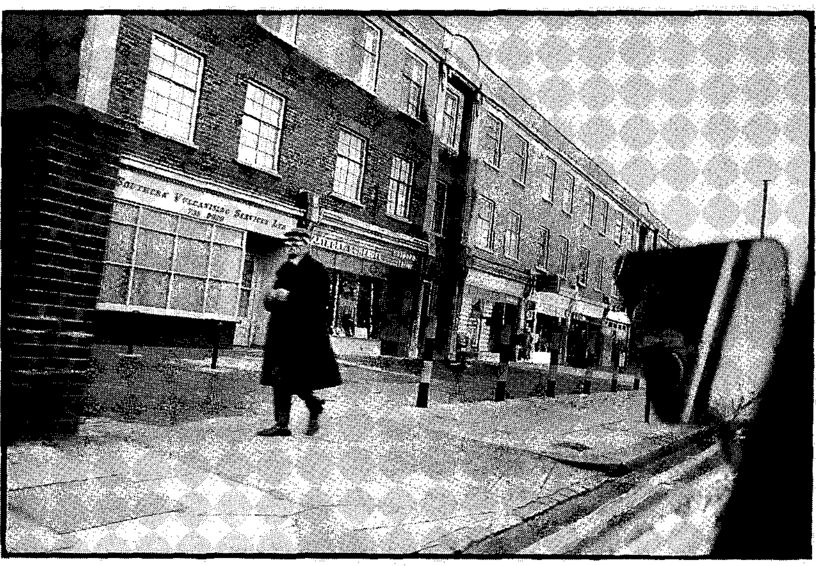
New York Academy of Sciences, 2 E. 63rd St. (838-0230)—"Strange Matter" revisits the inks and watercolors of Roz Chast. Through Jan. 10. (Open weekdays, 10 to 5.)

New York Public Library, Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. (869-8089)—Part II of "The Hand of the Poet" presents original manuscripts by the likes of Cummings, Moore, Merrill, Auden, Bishop, Lowell, Moss, Nabokov, and Sexton. Through Feb. 15. (Berg Collection. Closed Mondays.) . . . ¶ "Artful Interiors: Rooms with a View" explores, through architectural books and design guides, the history of interior design from 1750 to 1950. Through March 29. (Salomon Room.) (Open Mondays, and Thursdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6; Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 11 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

(Unless otherwise noted, uptown and downtown galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; Chelsea galleries are generally closed Tuesdays and open Sundays.)

Jörg Immendorff—Grotesque drawings and a painting (all strongly reminiscent of the sav-



Linda McCartney, *Fear Crawled*, 1973

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ROADWORKS

photographs by

LINDA McCARTNEY

November 8, 1996 – February 9, 1997

ROADWORKS: photographs and words by Linda McCartney
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age satires of another German, Georg Grosz) based on the artist's designs for a production of Stravinsky's opera "The Rake's Progress" at Salzburg in 1994. In a series of gouaches, Immendorff identifies himself with the opera's protagonist, Tom Rakewell; "In the House of Mother Goose," for example, shows him, in hideous whiteface, contemplating himself in a hand mirror that reflects the sly face of an ape. One wall is given over to a twenty-three-foot canvas of the stage as a battlefield, with the players revealed, often lewdly, from behind. Through Jan. 18. (Werner, 21 E. 67th St. 988-1623. Open Mondays.)

Short List—**richard baker,** Washburn, 20 W. 57th St. 397-6780. Through Jan. 11. . . . **david bierk,** Associated American Artists, 20 W. 57th St. 399-5510. Through Jan. 11. . . . **gordon cook,** Schmidt-Bingham, 41 E. 57th St. 888-1122. Through Feb. 1. . . . **jean-baptiste-camille corot,** Salander-O'Reilly, 20 E. 79th St. 879-6606. Open Mondays; through Jan. 13. . . . **david dewey,** Tatistcheff, 50 W. 57th St. 664-0907. Through Jan. 30. . . . **jim dine,** Pace Wildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. 421-3292. Through Jan. 11. . . . **suzan frecon,** Hirschl & Adler Modern, 21 E. 70th St., 535-8810; and Markey, 55 Vandam St., 627-4446. Both shows through Jan. 11. . . . **philip sherrod,** Stone, 113 E. 90th St. 988-6870. Through Jan. 31. . . . **leon polk smith,** McCoy, 41 E. 57th St. 319-1996. Open Mondays; through Jan. 25. . . . **george wexler,** Fischbach, 24 W. 57th St. 757-2345. Through Feb. 1. . . . **jimmy wright** and **jack bush,** DC Moore, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 247-2111. Both shows through Feb. 1. . . . **zao wou-ki,** Krugier, 41 E. 57th St. 755-7288. Through Jan. 18.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Ellen Cantor—*Wall drawings, collages, and a video.* Cantor's work dwells on sexuality—particularly sexual violence—within a quasi-mythic dream world (Bambi plays a conspicuous role). The video is especially successful in its juxtaposition of images from "The *Sound of Music" and "The Texas Chainsaw* Massacre": Julie Andrews pirouettes amid Alpine scenery, then the chainsaw-wielding maniac enacts the same movement. The voice-over, in contrast, is by a woman who drily recounts the events of an abusive relationship. Through Jan. 12. (XL, 504 W. 22nd St. 462-4111.)

Robert Overby (1935-93)—The graphic designer had a brief high-art period in the seventies, exhibiting with such big guns as Ryman, LeWitt, Andre, and Smithson; then he quit the art world to exercise his minimalist imperiousness in corporate meetings. (Legend has it that he would cut short a presentation whenever a client questioned his aesthetic judgment.) Despite his runaway commercial success (Toyota logos, MOMA catalogues, *Kiwanis* magazine), he continued to make art for himself, and this show brings together two strands of his compulsively well-catalogued output: slick, elliptical paintings that mixed Old Master compositions with Madison Avenue-style manipulation ("Madonna Ass"), and sardonically literal latex casts of household architecture ("Kitchen Cabinets, Paul's Place"). There is a seductive air of privacy and vengeance to the whole affair. Through Jan. 12. (Fredericks, 504 W. 22nd St. 633-6555.)

Ulf Rollof—"27 March 1994 (Fountain)," a rather bizarre sculpture/contraption. The Swedish artist has suspended the trunk of a fir tree above a trough, where it is doused by a continuous stream of soapy water; the murky runoff collects below. You might say it's a pure art work, animated by an engaging purposelessness. Through Jan. 12. (Morris Healy, 530 W. 22nd St. 243-3753.)

Sue Williams—New paintings, predominantly large-scale, by a young artist who first won renown for her riffs (often savagely funny) on the war of the sexes. They continue in the direction of her Twomblyesque previous endeavors, but they're much more successful. Williams's former vitriol has given way to an intricate, all-over play of shapes; sex and its grotesqueries remain the iconographic core, but the imagery blends seamlessly with abstract patterns. The male master of choice now seems to be de Kooning—she particularly favors the looping line of his final manner—though her appropriation of such a canonical macho artist obviously has its ironies. Through Jan. 31. (303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 255-1121.)

William Wood—Abstract grisailles whose repetitive, vaguely organic forms suggest images in an electron microscope. They're quite beautiful, and, like the paintings of David Reed and Gerhard Richter, they remain somewhat mysterious in the way they achieve their formal effects. Through Jan. 25. (Kirkland, 504 W. 22nd St. 627-3930. Opens Sundays at noon.)

"From Printed Line to Woven Flower," at the Fashion Institute of Technology.

"Flying Saucer Project"—Ceramics, furniture, paintings, and sculptures by Mary Heilmann, Steve Keister, and Steven Baines. Heilmann, who is now best known for her woozily sensuous abstract paintings, started out as a ceramist; a year ago she began working with Keister and Baines, and this is the fruit of their labors. Although the mix of fine-art and practical objects is initially perplexing, the show repays sustained attention. Through Jan. 12. (Hearn, 530 W. 22nd St. 727-7366.)

Short List—**stephen di cillo** and **julie langsam,** Clementine, 526 W. 26th St. 243-5937. Both shows through Jan. 26. . . . **kk kozik,** Maynes, 529 W. 20th St. 741-3318. Through Jan. 12. . . . **helmut middendorf,** Nosei, 530 W. 22nd St. 741-8695. Through Jan. 10. . . . **jeff nelson,** Greene Naftali, 526 W. 26th St. 463-7770. Opens at noon; through Feb. 2.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Deborah Butterfield—Nine horses, fashioned from scrap metal, rusted pipe, and bronze casts of driftwood, brambles, thorny sticks—it looks as if the sculptor can make any old piece of junk describe a horse. Her descriptions vary according to the material: in one work, a hunk of driftwood captures the saddle-smooth curve of spine; in another, a steel tread from an industrial stairway serves as a muscular haunch. The looseness of such associations gives the work a freehand quality, as if, in her travels, Butterfield had picked up lines from Degas drawings instead of branches and bent metal slats. Through Jan. 18. (Thorp, 103 Prince St. 431-6880.)

Nicole Eisenman—A freewheeling, virtuosic display of works in every medium, from outrageous cartoons (cowgirls defecating over the corral fence, Jesus sodomizing himself) to large-scale, obsessively inventive installations. Much of the artist's work is clumsy, and her humor is frequently on the whoopee-cushion level, but all the same a powerful, goofy allure pervades the show. Through Jan. 11. (Tilton, 49 Greene St. 941-1775.)

Ed Lipski—Stark and scary sculptures a child might dream up: a black fake-leather balloon, a beakless giant black bird, an aggressively ill-tempered banner (". . . I saw a bird and it was bad and I went to the sea and it was bad . . ."). Lipski creates an air of infantile menace which is, literally, hard to shake: at the door, a boy-size manikin—nicely dressed but with a black smiley face pasted where his features should be—extends his hand in greeting. Through Jan. 31. (In Khan, 415 West Broadway. 226-6484.)

John Olsen—Drawings, sculptures, and assemblages by a prodigiously talented Danish artist passionately engaged with the natural world. He lives and works on the wild North Sea coast of Denmark and in the Faeroe Islands, where he collects beach detritus—animal skulls and bones, clumps of feathers, mummified seagulls, dried seaweed, and all manner of flotsam—which he arranges in tall, deep cabinets. The result is less suggestive of Joseph Cornell than of a mad Victorian museum keeper. Drawings executed in a sauna use the artist's own sweat to transform charcoal and earth-toned chalk into swirling, evocative visions. Two enormous wood sculptures, one inspired by an armadillo's carapace, the other by the skeleton of a roe deer, dominate this extremely impressive exhibition. Through Jan. 11. (DCA, 420 West Broadway. 334-3331.)

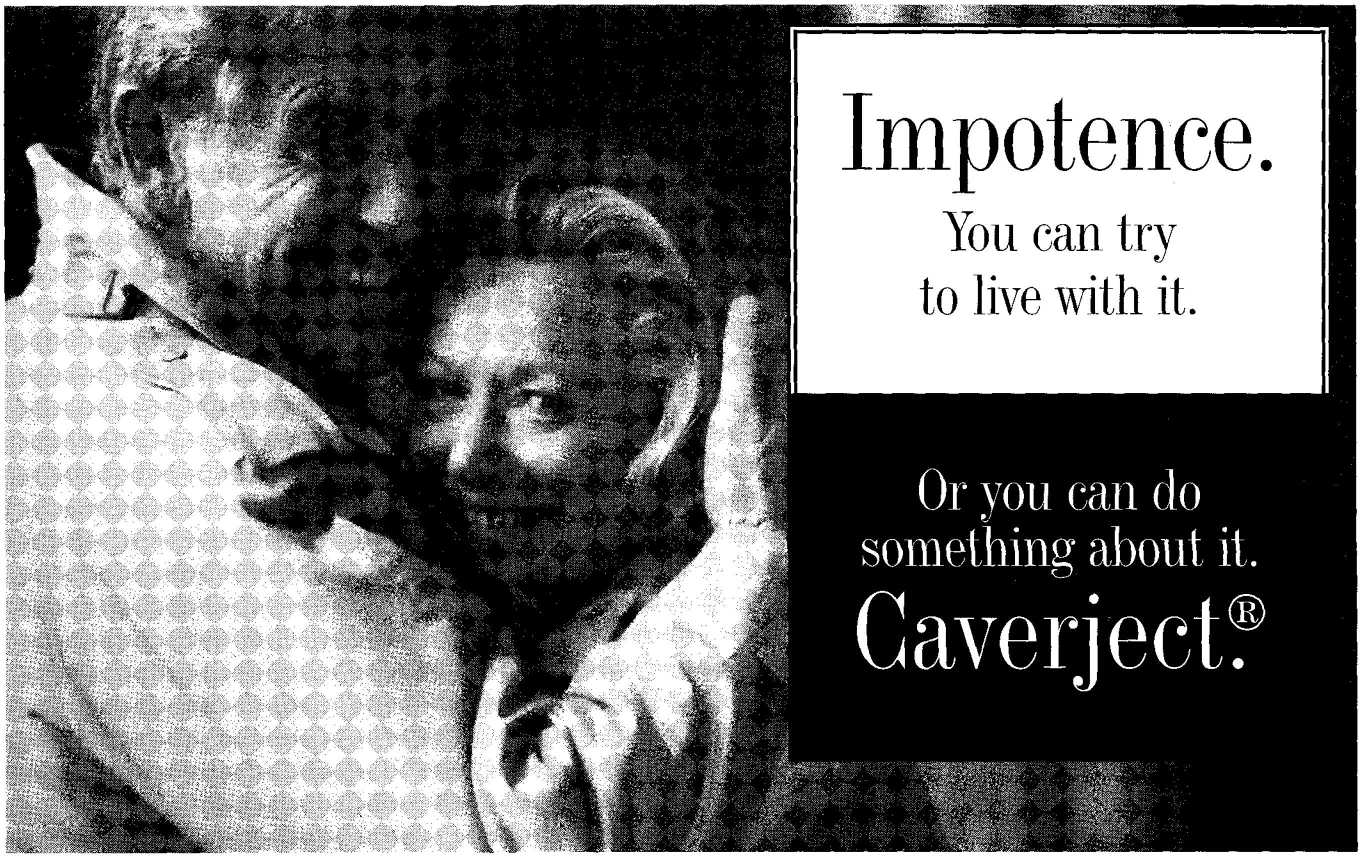
"Miniature Obsessions"—Works by outsider artists on an ambitiously small scale: furniture carved from soap, totems carved and painted on toothpicks, group portraits and street scenes embroidered from unravelled socks. Through Jan. 11. (American Primitive, 594 Broadway. 966-1530.)

Short List—**william w. adkins,** Ricco-Maresca, 152 Wooster St. 780-0071. Through Feb. 1. . . . **charles arnoldi,** Cowles, 420 West Broadway. 925-3500. Through Jan. 25. . . . **alan belcher,** Shainman, 560 Broadway. 966-3866. Through Feb. 8. . . . **mc willie chambers,** Collins, 83 Grand St. 226-1861. Through Jan. 25. . . . **stan douglas,** Zwirner, 43 Greene St. 966-9074. Through Jan. 25. . . . **shawn dulaney,** Bridges and Bodell, 13 E. 7th St. 477-1820. Through Jan. 19. . . . **maria epes,** Ceres, 584 Broadway. 226-4725. Through Feb. 1. . . . **karen frances fitch,** Prince Street Gallery, 121 Wooster St. 226-9402. Opens at noon; through Jan. 14. . . . **felix gonzalez-torres,** Rosen, 130 Prince St. 941-0203. Through Jan. 25. . . . **ellen harvey,** Limbo Café, 47 Avenue A, at 4th St. 477-5271. Through Feb. 3. . . . **pierre le-tan,** Kasmin, 74 Grand St. 219-3219. Through Jan. 18. . . . **joseph marioni,** Blum, 99 Wooster St. 343-0441. Through Jan. 11. . . . **liisa roberts,** Lehmann Maupin, 39 Greene St. 965-0753. Through Feb. 1. . . . **kenny scharf,** Shafrazi, 119 Wooster St., 274-9300; and Cowles, 420 West Broadway, 925-3500. Both shows through Jan. 25.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Ansel Adams (1902-84) / **"A Season of Victory"**—Vintage prints (smaller, generally, than the artist's later ones), including views of Yosemite, the Grand Canyon, and Alaska. / The Yankees on the road to this year's Big Show, by Barton Silverman, David Burnett, Linda Cataffo, and photographers from the Associ-

ELIZA GRAN



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Over 200,000 men have chosen *Caverject* from the available treatment options described by their doctor. Once the injection has been prepared, simply taking about 10 seconds to self-inject *Caverject* into the side of the penis puts the medicine right where you need it. This causes the erection to occur like it would naturally by relaxing the smooth muscle and allowing blood to become trapped in the penis. The erection usually takes only 5 to 20 minutes to develop. This allows for the natural progression that typically comes with foreplay, so you and your partner can enjoy a complete sexual experience.

IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION

It is essential that your physician train you on how to use Caverject *and determine the correct dose you need.* Once the ideal amount has been established, the erection usually lasts about one hour. Priapism, a condition in which an erection lasts longer than 6 hours, was reported in less than 1/2 of 1% of all patients. Although rare and usually dose related, it requires immediate medical attention. The most common side effect of *Caverject* is mild to moderate pain after injection. In clinical studies, this was reported by about one third of patients; although only 3% discontinued use for this reason. *Caverject* should not be used by certain men including those with penile implants. **See product information on the next page for additional safety information and contraindications.**

FREE INFORMATION KIT

Call 1-800-414-6269 today and we'll send you a free information kit about *Caverject.* **And because you need a prescription to get *Caverject,*** we'll even include a list of urologists and other doctors in your area who treat impotence frequently. Your privacy is guaranteed.

A proven treatment for impotence

CALL 1-800-414-6269 TODAY FOR A FREE INFORMATION KIT.

(Users of CAVERJECT can call for our free User Support package.)

Pharmacia & Upjohn

Caverject® Sterile Powder
alprostadil for injection

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ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Caverject® Sterile Powder
alprostadil for injection

What is CAVERJECT® Sterile Powder? CAVERJECT Sterile Powder is a *prescription drug used to treat impotence,* a condition known medically as erectile dysfunction. CAVERJECT is self-injected into a specific area of the penis.

How effective is CAVERJECT? In clinical studies, CAVERJECT caused an erection firm enough for sexual intercourse in over 80% of men who used it. The efficacy of CAVERJECT depends on determination of the correct dose during a visit with your doctor or health care provider, and *the use of proper self-injection* technique.

Who should not use CAVERJECT? CAVERJECT should not be used by men with any of the following conditions: Conditions that might result in long-lasting erections, such as sickle cell anemia or trait, leukemia, and tumor of the bone marrow (multiple myeloma); Penile implants; Abnormally formed penis or Peyronie's disease; Men who have been advised by their doctor not to engage in sexual activity; Allergy to CAVERJECT (alprostadil) or any of its ingredients. In addition, CAVERJECT should not be used by women or children.

What are the precautions associated with use of CAVERJECT?

1. Priapism (erection lasting over 6 hours): Erections lasting more than 6 hours (priapism) were reported in fewer than 1 of every 200 patients in clinical studies. This condition, although rare, requires immediate medical attention from your doctor or the closest emergency room because *it can result in permanent damage* to the tissue of the penis. To minimize the risk of priapism, CAVERJECT should be used at the lowest effective dose.

2. Penile fibrosis: In clinical studies, the overall incidence of penile fibrosis (lumps or curving of the erect penis), including a condition called Peyronie's disease, was 3 of every 100 men who used CAVERJECT. In one self-injection study where CAVERJECT was used for up to 18 *months, penile fibrosis was reported* in 7.8% of men.

3. Patients on anticoagulants (blood thinners): Anticoagulants such as warfarin or heparin can contribute to an increased risk of bleeding after injection. Thereafter, tell your health care provider if you are taking this type of medicine.

4. Determination of the cause of impotence : Underlying treatable causes of impotence should be diagnosed and treated before starting treatment with CAVERJECT.

5. Sexually transmitted or blood-borne diseases and injection-site bleeding: Use of CAVERJECT offers no protection from the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including HIV infection. You should understand the protective measures necessary to guard against the spread of STDs. The injection of CAVERJECT can result in a small amount of bleeding at the site of injection, which could increase the risk of transmission of blood-borne diseases between patients infected with blood-borne diseases and their partners.

Do not share or reuse needles or syringes.

6. Patient information: Patient instructions for administration are included in each package of CAVERJECT. You should read and understand these instructions completely. Properly discard needles after use. Do not allow anyone else to use your medicine.

***7. Dose titration:* To ensure safe and effective use of CAVERJECT, you should be thoroughly instructed and trained in the *self-injection technique by your health care provider* before beginning treatment at home. The desirable dose should be established during an office visit, and should not be changed without first consulting your health care provider. The instructions for preparation and self-injection of the CAVERJECT solution should be carefully followed.**

8. Regular checkups: You should visit your health care provider regularly *while on self-injection treatment* with CAVERJECT. It is recommended that you visit the prescribing professional's office every 3 months. At that time, the safety and efficacy of therapy with CAVERJECT should be evaluated, and the dose adjusted, if needed.

Can I use CAVERJECT while taking other medications? In clinical trials, use of medicines to treat high blood pressure, diabetes, arthritis, and fluid retention had no effect on the efficacy or safety of CAVERJECT. *However, the health* care provider who prescribes CAVERJECT for you should be aware of all medicines you are taking.

What side effects might occur during use of CAVERJECT? Before using CAVERJECT, talk with your doctor about possible side effects and what to do if side effects occur. The most common side effect reported in clinical studies was *mild to moderate penile pain* after injection. About one third of men reported this effect. Three percent of men discontinued treatment because of penile pain. Other side effects involving the penis and reported by 1% to 4% of patients included prolonged erection, penile fibrosis, injection site bruising, penis disorder (including numbness, infection, *irritation, sensitivity, itching,* and discoloration), penile rash, and penile swelling. Priapism (erection *lasting over 6 hours*) was rarely reported. Seek immediate medical attention if this occurs. Other side effects have also been reported with the use of CAVERJECT. Call your doctor if you notice any redness, lumps, swelling, tenderness, or curving of the erect penis.

What is a typical dose of CAVERJECT? The correct dose of CAVERJECT for you must be *determined by your health care provider* during an office or clinic visit. Most men will use between 5 and 20 *micrograms* per dose; doses greater than 60 micrograms are not recommended. The dose of CAVERJECT that is selected for you during your office visit should not be changed without consulting your health care provider. If you accidentally inject an overdose of CAVERJECT, *you* should call your health care provider immediately.

How fast will CAVERJECT work? *The correct dose properly injected* should produce an erection in 5 to 20 minutes. The erection should last for about 1 hour.

How often can I use CAVERJECT? *Generally, CAVERJECT should be* used no more than three times per week, with at least 24 hours between each use.

How should CAVERJECT be stored? Unused packs of CAVERJECT may be stored at or below 77°F (25°C). *Do not freeze. After mixing the* solution for injection, CAVERJECT should be used immediately.

CAUTION: *Federal law prohibits dispensing* without a prescription. You must see a doctor or authorized health care provider to receive a prescription.

Pharmacia & Upjohn Company
Kalamazoo, MI 49001, USACB-2-S

ated Press and *Sports Illustrated.* Both shows through Jan. 11. (Danziger, 130 Prince St. 226-0056.)

Lynn Geesaman / Eugène Atget (1857-1927)—An unreconstructed seeker of beauty in the landscape who is finding more ready acceptance in our post-everything climate, Geesaman here captures the Parc de Sceaux, one of Atget's most sublime haunts, in her own consummate style. In one of several views, a sharp alabaster sky separates two sentry rows of trees, their branches glowing like bones in an X-ray, their leaves like feathers. Other sites in France and Belgium provide her with similar successes, but none approach the ripe kitsch of *the iron-filigree cupola of* the Love Temple, at Longwood Gardens, in Pennsylvania. / Seven vintage albumen prints of gardens (Versailles, Saint-Cloud, Sceaux) and street scenes. Don't miss them. Both shows through Jan. 11. (Richardson, 560 Broadway. 343-1255.)

Jean Kallina—Cooly atmospheric black-and-white interiors taken in a French château, a Nova Scotia fishing shack, and elsewhere. Through Jan. 18. (Benrubi, 52 E. 76th St. 517-3766.)

"All You See!"—Sarah Morthland, the founder and former director of Gallery 292, has opened a new space in Chelsea, in an 1860 town house that at one time sheltered a speakeasy. The eclectic lot here (the title is from an optometrist's trade sign) includes antique and recent abstract photographs, photograms, X-rays, and other oddments. Through Jan. 12. (225 Tenth Ave., at 23rd St. 242-7767. Opens at noon.)

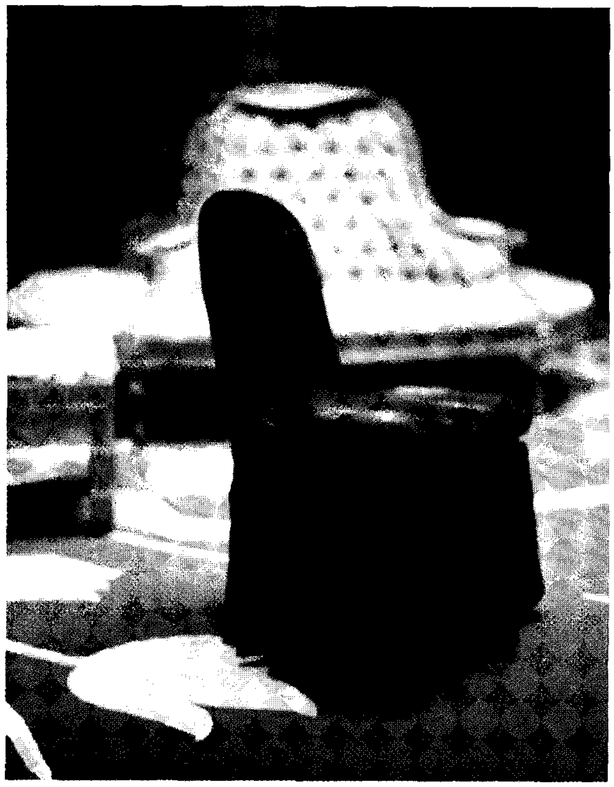
"Études d'Après Nature"—A survey of studies made by little-known nineteenth-century photographers for use by painters of the day. Through Jan. 11. (Saul, 560 Broadway. 341-0747.)

"Making Pictures: Women and Photography, 1975-Now"—Part II of this smart survey features work by Eleanor Antin, Sophie Calle, Louise Lawler, Sherrie Levine, Elaine Reichek, and Carrie Mae Weems. Through Jan. 18. (Klagsbrun, 80 Mercer St. 925-5157.)

International Center of Photography Midtown, Sixth Ave. at 43rd St. (860-1777)—"Roadworks," a large selection of black-and-white prints by Linda McCartney. Through Feb. 9. . . . ¶ "All Zones Off Peak: Photographs of Liverpool by Tom Wood." Through Feb. 9. . . . ¶ "A Celebration of 25 Years of Light Gallery." Through Feb. 9. (Open daily, except Mondays, 11 to 6, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

Short List—JUAN CARLOS ALOM, Throckmorton, 153 E. 61st St. 223-1059. Through Feb. 1. . . . **DARREL ELLIS,** Art in General, 79 Walker St. 219-0473. Opens at noon; through Jan. 25. . . . **JILL FREEDMAN,** Witkin, 415 West Broadway. 925-5510. Through Jan. 11. . . . **LISETTE MODEL** and **DIANE ARBUS,** Pace Wildenstein MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 759-7999. Both shows through Jan. 11. . . . **JEANNE MOUTOUSSAMY-ASHE,** Leica, 670 Broadway. 777-3051. Opens Saturdays at noon; through Jan. 22. . . . **FAWN POTASH,** Gallery 292, 120 Wooster St. 431-0292. Through Jan. 18. . . . **JOHN SCHABEL,** Morris Healy, 530 W. 22nd St. 243-3753. Through Jan. 12.

(See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum and the Museum of Modern Art.)



"Hughes Apt., Paris, Chair" (1989), by Jean Kallina (Benrubi).

CLASSICAL MUSIC

(The box-office number for Alice Tully Hall is 875-5050, and for Carnegie Hall and Weill Recital Hall, 247-7800.)

OPERA

Metropolitan Opera—LA BOHÈME, with Patricia Racette, Gwynne Geyer, Marcello Giordani, and Anthony Michaels-Moore; conducted by Nello Santi. (Jan. 8 at 8 and Jan. 11 at 1:30.) . . . **TOSCA,** with Maria Guleghina, Sergej Larin, and James Morris; Christian Badea. (Jan. 9 at 8.) . . . **LA TRAVIATA,** with Veronica Villarroel, Vincenzo La Scola, and Roberto Frontali; Maurizio Barbacini. (Jan. 10 at 8.) . . . **CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA** and **PAGLIACCI,** with Dolora Zajick, Fabio Armiliato, and Bruno Pola in the former, and Diana Soviero, Johan Botha, and Paolo Gavanelli in the latter; Simone Young conducts both. (Jan. 11 at 8.) . . . **I PURITANI,** with Ruth Ann Swenson, Stuart Neill, Thomas Hampson, and Alastair Miles; Edoardo Müller. (Jan. 13 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000. . . . **NOTE:** On Jan. 12 at 3, tenor Luciano Pavarotti offers a recital of songs and arias, with pianist Leone Magiera.)

Opera Manhattan—Gabriel Guimarães conducts stagings of two Italian sacred operas: Alessandro Stradella's "San Giovanni Battista" (composed in 1675) and Liciano Recife's "Cecilia" (from 1934). (Church of the Heavenly Rest, Fifth Ave. at 90th St. Jan. 7 and Jan. 10 at 8. For information about tickets, call 628-3600.)

Opera Orchestra of New York—Presenting a concert performance of Rossini's "La Cenerentola," with mezzo-soprano Vivica Genaux and tenor Bruce Fowler. Eve Queler conducts. (Carnegie Hall. Jan. 12 at 8.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic—Zubin Mehta conducts Mahler's Symphony No. 3, with mezzo-soprano Florence Quivar, the women of the New York Choral Artists, and the American Boychoir. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. Jan. 9-11 at 8.)

American Composers Orchestra—Sessions's Symphony No. 2 is the classic in a concert that also includes Steven Mackey's "Deal," John Zorn's "Aporias" (featuring pianist Stephen

Drury), and Lou Harrison's orchestration of Cage's Suite for Toy Piano. Dennis Russell Davies conducts. (Carnegie Hall. Jan. 12 at 3.)

RECITALS

Pulse Percussion Ensemble—The five-member group, a subdivision of the New Music Consort, presents a program that includes music by Marita Bolles, Carlos Stasi, David Clark Little, and Charles Wuorinen, as well as a dose of Ghanaian drumming. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. Jan. 8 at 8.)

Bargemusic—String quartets by Haydn (in C Major, Op. 54, No. 2) and Mendelssohn (in A Major, Op. 13). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-4061. Jan. 9 at 7:30 and Jan. 12 at 4.)

"New Music for Old Strings"—That's the apt title of a concert of works for theorbo (by Richard Brodhead and David Loeb) and for mandolin ensemble (by Tully Cathey and David Balakrishnan). The performers are the Modern Mandolin Quartet and theorbist Richard Stone (who will also play a piece of old music for old strings, the Toccata Prima by the seventeenth-century composer Girolamo Kapsberger). (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. Jan. 9 at 8.)

Charles van Tassel—The Dutch baritone, with pianist Marien van Nieukerken, performs two separate programs. Jan. 10 at 8: The première of Eugene Phillips's "Three Psalms by Leo Vroman," as well as Neely Bruce's "Seven Songs to Poems by Paul Goodman" and songs by twentieth-century composers from Holland (including Willem Pijper, Hendrik Andriessen, and Ton de Leeuw). (Weill Recital Hall, at Carnegie Hall.) . . . ¶ Jan. 12 at 3: The Eugene Phillips songs, plus piano and vocal music by Schubert, culminating in "Die Schöne Müllerin." Presented by the Brooklyn Friends of Chamber Music. (Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian Church, 85 S. Oxford St., Brooklyn. For information about tickets, call 718-855-3053.)

Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center—A concert to celebrate Schubert's two-hundredth birthday (which falls later this month), consisting of selections from his instrumental and vocal chamber music: his songs "Auf dem Strom" (with obbligato French horn) and "Der Hirt auf dem Felsen" (with obbligato clarinet), the "Arpeggione" Sonata (played here on cello and piano), and the "Trout" Quintet. (Alice Tully Hall. Jan. 10 at 8 and Jan. 12 at 5.)

Considering Schubert—The Metropolitan Museum hosts the first of three talk-and-play days designed to elucidate the composer's life and works. Jan. 11 at 4: A panel discussion about Schubert's health. . . . ¶ At 7: Performances of his String Quartet in B-Flat Major (D. 112) and String Quintet in C Major (D. 956). (Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949.)

Bachmann-Klibonoff-Fridman Trio—The ensemble performs an all-Brahms concert that comprises the Piano Trio No. 1 (in B Major, Op. 8, in the composer's revision of 1890), the A-Minor Clarinet Trio (Op. 114), and the A-Major Piano Quartet (Op. 26), with clarinettist Alan R. Kay and violist Eufrosina Raileanu assisting. (Kosciuszko Foundation, 15 E. 65th St. Jan. 11 at 7. For information about tickets, call 333-5200.)

Nari Matsuura and **Katia Grineva**—Over the next six weeks, Le Refuge Inn's Sunday series will showcase a dozen young pianists, two to a program, performing cornerstones of the instrument's repertoire. In the first installment, Ms. Matsuura performs Mozart's F-Major Sonata (K. 332) and Liszt's "Après une Lecture du Dante"; Ms. Grineva offers works by Chopin. (620 City Island Ave., City Island, the Bronx. 718-885-2478. Jan. 12 at noon.)

Emerson String Quartet—The foursome plays Beethoven's Quartets in D Major (Op. 18, No. 3) and F Major (Op. 59, No. 1); colleagues assist in Schoenberg's "Verklärte Nacht." (Alice Tully Hall. Jan. 12 at 2.)

Christian Zacharias—The pianist appears in his first New York recital, performing a set of Scarlatti sonatas, seven Debussy preludes, and Schubert's D-Major Sonata (D. 850). (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. Jan. 12 at 3.)

Piffaro—The Renaissance wind band offers Northern Italian songs and dances from the fifteenth century. (Cloisters, Fort Tryon Park. 650-2290. Jan. 12 at 3.)

Kuijken String Quartet—"Kuijken" stands alongside "Leonhardt" and "Brüggen" as one of the prominent surnames of the historical-performance movement that emerged from the Low Countries in the late nineteen-sixties. Violinist Sigiswald Kuijken and his brothers Wieland, a cellist and viola da gambist, and Barthold, a Baroque flutist, all attended the Brussels Conservatory; they went on to develop a philosophy that connected seventeenth- and eighteenth-century music to other aspects of the culture and daily life of that period. (For some years they all lived in an ancient farmhouse in the Belgian countryside, with few modern amenities, the better to grasp the essence of earlier times.) In 1986 Sigiswald and Wieland, the two string players, founded a quartet to explore the Classical repertoire, particularly the works of Haydn and Mozart. In its New York début, the foursome (with its current second violinist François Fernandez and violist Marleen Thiers) performs quartets by Haydn (his two "Lobkowitz" Quartets, Op. 77, No. 1 and No. 2—his last two completed works in the genre) and Mozart (in C Major, K. 465). (Frick Collection, 1 E. 70th St. 288-0700. Jan. 12 at 5.)

LISTENING BOOTH

Very High Baroque—For most of us, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century music means the masters of Italy, Germany, France, and Austria. More intrepid listeners have a passing acquaintance with the composers of, say, Spain or Sweden. Now, probably for the first time ever, true aficionados can help themselves to an entire disk of Bolivian Baroque music—and a first-class one, at that. **Musique Baroque à la Royale Audience de Charcas** (on the K617 label: K617064) is the fifteenth release in an exceedingly interesting series, "Les Chemins du Baroque," which explores the progress of European traditions as they strayed far from their origins (principally to Latin America). This installment escorts listeners a mile and a half above sea level to the city of Sucre, whose churches and convents (according to the liner notes) were, thanks to the wealth that the neighboring silver mines afforded, plum assignments for musicians. Instead of the usual Baroque chorales and motets, we here visit the repertoire of the *xácara*, the *rorro*, and the *villancico*, as composed by such local eminences as Juan de Araujo (1646-1712) and Roque Ceruti (ca. 1686-1760). Their music was based on Italianate models—Ceruti can be downright Vivaldian—but spicy rhythms and guitar-infused continuo realizations lend it an exotic accent. The singers and players of the Ensemble Elyma (with supporting instrumental and choral groups) perform with polish and verve, and sensitive engineering captures the exciting sonic environment of the cathedral in Concepción, where most of these performances were recorded last April.

Nina Boesen—Violinist, playing works by Bach and Brahms, with pianist Ilan Rechtman. (Hotel Wales, Madison Ave. at 92nd St. Jan. 12 at 6 and 8. No tickets necessary.)

Christopher Taylor—Pianist, performing Bach's Fantasie and Fugue in A Minor, selections from Bolcom's "Twelve New Études," Bartók's "Out of Doors," and Schubert's A-Major Sonata (D. 959). (Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center. Jan. 13 at 7:30. For information about tickets, call 875-5050.)

Pinchas Zukerman and Marc Neikrug—The violinist-violist and his longtime keyboard colleague offer the first of two programs in which they will survey all the violin and viola sonatas of Brahms. In this recital, they perform the G-Major Violin Sonata (Op. 78, No. 1), the F-Minor Viola Sonata (Op. 120, No. 1), and the C-Minor Scherzo. Presented by the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. (Alice Tully Hall. Jan. 14 at 7:30. The second Brahms concert will be held on Jan. 28.)

Kathleen Battle—Have you noticed how people have pretty much stopped talking about Ms. Battle? After the Metropolitan Opera fired her, in 1994, definitively defending its artists and staff against what it termed her "unprofessional behavior," it became increasingly difficult for listeners to reconcile the nasty things they were reading in the papers with a vocal timbre based on a nearly unprecedented intensification of sweetness, and they seem to have decided that the soprano's tantrums had far outpaced her artistry. This concert, with pianist Brian Zeger assisting, is her only New York recital this season; she'll sing pieces by Handel, Wolf, Liszt, Strauss, and Turina. (Carnegie Hall. Jan. 14 at 7:30.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

Bridge-and-Tunnel Rivalry—Six of the area's best high-school basketball teams take a break from official competition to vie for bragging rights in a three-game showcase at Madison Square Garden on Jan. 11, starting at 11 A.M. For the spectator, it's a chance to scope out a number of terrific local players before higher education, team bidding, and product-endorsement contracts color their styles. Some matchups to watch: Jamar Fields, senior guard at St. Raymond's (the Bronx), facing Al Harrington, junior swingman for St. Patrick's (Elizabeth); senior guards Delvon Arrington and Anthony Perry leading St. Anthony (Jersey City), which as of press time was unbeaten in its last fifty-five games, against Eric Barkley of Christ the King (Queens), who shot thirty-four points in his school's season opener, a one-point overtime victory against Rice (Manhattan); and James Felton of Marist (Bayonne) challenging Elton Brand of Peekskill High School. (465-6741.)

Readings—Jan. 10 at 7:30: Irish prosateur Roddy Doyle reads from his latest novel, "The Woman Who Walked Into Doors." (Barnes & Noble, 33 E. 17th St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ Jan. 13 at 8: Rosario Ferré reads from her 1995 novel, "House on the Lagoon," and Bob Shacochis from "The Immaculate Invasion," his forthcoming chronicle of the 1994 American occupation of Haiti. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100.) . . . ¶ Jan. 14 at 8: Writers William Gass ("The Tunnel") and Allegra Goodman ("The Family Markowitz") read from their works. (National Arts Club, 15 Gramercy Park S. No tickets necessary.)

Talks—Jan. 8 at 6: With the aid of slides showing recently installed streetcar systems in such cities as Dallas, Denver, and Memphis, George Haikalis, a civil engineer and a transportation planner, makes the case for bringing back New York City's trolleys. (Municipal Art Society, 457 Madison Ave., at 51st St. 935-3960.) . . . ¶ Jan. 11 at noon and 2: In a Jazz for Young People concert, Wynton Marsalis and the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra answer the question "What Is Swing?" (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050.) . . . ¶ Jan. 11 at 2: A two-day retrospective of the works of the British filmmaker Isaac Julien starts with a screening of his latest film, "Frantz Fanon: Black Skin, White Mask," and an interview with the director by the film critic B. Ruby Rich. (American Museum of the Moving Image, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria. 718-784-4520.)

Walks—Jan. 11 at 1: Big Onion Walking Tours goes dining on the streets of the Jewish East Side, Chinatown, and Little Italy. For more information, call 439-1090 . . . . ¶ Jan. 12 at 1: Jack Kaplan and Ellen Borker, volunteer guides at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, lead a tour of the garden's conservatory titled "Ten Plants That Shook the World," a consideration of some of the vegetation responsible for life as we know it—bamboo, rubber and olive trees, papyrus, and so on. (Washington Ave. at Eastern Parkway. No charge beyond garden admission.)

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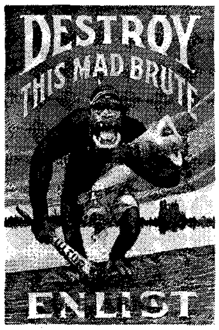

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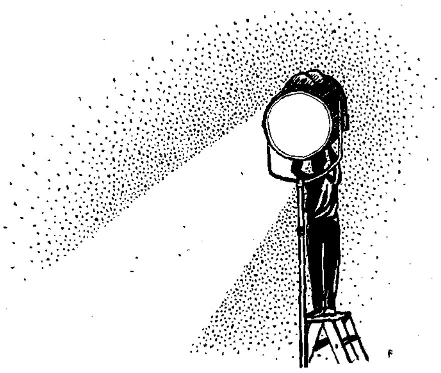
THE MOVIES



FILMS OPENING THIS WEEK

Jackie Chan's First Strike—The Hong Kong action hero fights the bad guys once again, in a film directed by Stanley Tong. Opening Jan. 10.

The Jew—The story of the heresy trial of the eighteenth-century Portuguese playwright Antonio José da Silva (Felipe Pinheiro), a convert to Catholicism who nevertheless became a victim of the Inquisition. Directed by Jom Tob Azulay. In Portuguese. Opening Jan. 8. (Film Forum.)

The Relic—A thriller about murders in a natural-history museum in Chicago, starring Penelope Ann Miller and Tom Sizemore and directed by Peter Hyams. Opening Jan. 10.

Screwed—Alex Crawford's documentary on Al Goldstein, the founder and editor of *Screw* magazine. Opening Jan. 10. (Cinema Village.)

Turbulence—Ray Liotta plays a serial killer aboard a jumbo jet on which one of the flight attendants (Lauren Holly) perfectly fits the profile of his victims, in a thriller directed by Robert Butler. Also starring Hector Elizondo. Opening Jan. 10.

CURRENT FILMS

(The signed notes are by Bruce Diones, Sarah Kerr, Anthony Lane, and Terrence Rafferty. If a movie has been reviewed in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given. Theatre information is listed on page 22.)

Beavis and Butt-head Do America—Here's an unexpected and hilarious turn of events: this animated film, based on the popular MTV show, may be the hippest comedy of the season. The crude and lifeless style in which Mike Judge's two disaffected adolescents are drawn wears a little thin over the course of a full-length movie, but the trendy catchphrases, the scatological jokes, and the misogynistic lewdness—a result of endless hours of music-video viewing—make for hormonal, anarchic fun. The plot has the boys on the road in search of thieves who have stolen their treasured television. Their monumentally stupid and childish observations burst like water balloons over the heads of everyone they encounter; the movie plays like a dumbed-down "Animal House," and its idiocy is irresistible.—B.D. (Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Manhattan Twin, Olympia, Orpheum VII, State, 34th Street Showplace, and Village Theatre VII.)

Big Night—The actor Stanley Tucci co-wrote (with Joseph Tropiano), co-directed (with Campbell Scott), and co-stars (with Tony Shalhoub) in this elegant, leisurely low-budget comedy about a struggling Italian restaurant run by a pair of immigrant brothers. The unusually happy, relaxed ensemble includes Ian Holm, Isabella Rossellini, Minnie Driver, Allison Janney, and Campbell Scott. The big set piece—a lavish dinner in honor of the singer-bandleader Louis Prima—is a fitting climax to the movie's patient accumulation of savory and blissfully pointless delights: a convincing illustration of how keen pleasure for pleasure's sake can be.—T.R. (9/23/96) (Cinema 3 and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Breaking the Waves—The Danish director Lars von Trier tells the sad story of a devout young Scottish woman (Emily Watson) who becomes a whore in order to save the life of her critically ill husband (Stellan Skarsgård). Von Trier gives the highbrow audience precisely what it wanted in the art-house boom years of the fifties and early sixties—nudity plus theology. The erotic-metaphysical hokum would be somewhat easier to take if the picture displayed anything resembling a genuine religious impulse.—T.R. (11/18/96) (Angelika Film Center and Eastside Playhouse.)

La Cérémonie—A psychological thriller written and directed by Claude Chabrol, about an upper-class couple (Jacqueline Bissett and Jean-Pierre Cassel), their housekeeper (Sandrine Bonnaire), and their nemesis, the local postmistress (Isabelle Huppert). In French. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

Citizen Ruth—Laura Dern gives a daringly repulsive performance as Ruth Stoops, a trashy drug addict who gets pregnant and becomes a pawn of both pro-life Christian zealots and kooky feminists. Alexander Payne's début comedy has a fresh, fast-paced cynicism reminiscent of Preston Sturges, but the un-Sturges-like topicality tends to weigh it down. Still, Dern is brilliant, and so is Mary Kay Place as the creepy Christian mom who tries to reform her.—S.K. (Angelika Film Center.)

The Crucible—Nicholas Hytner's florid, hyperbolic film of Arthur Miller's 1953 drama, about the Salem witchcraft trials, reveals the play as a characteristic product of its time—not so much in its anti-McCarthyism as in its sexual politics. The themes that come through most clearly here are fear of women and hatred of youth: the teen-age girls of Salem squeal and writhe, and the hero, John Proctor (Daniel Day-Lewis)—the manliest man in the colonies—swings from the gallows. Also with Winona Ryder, Paul Scofield, Joan Allen, and Bruce Davison.—T.R. (12/2/96) (Angelika Film Center, Baronet, Chelsea Cinemas, and Lincoln Square.)

Daylight—A disaster flick that involves an explosion in a tunnel, a setting that supplies an especially high number of ways for people to die: flood, fire, suffocation, electrocution, falling chunks of concrete. Sylvester Stallone stars as a former emergency-services professional who is obsessed with rescuing the trapped survivors—which is lucky for them, because they're clumsy, hysterical, and mean. The special effects pale before the star's vanity.—S.K. (Art Greenwich Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, National Twin, and Park & 86th Street Cinemas.)

The English Patient—Written and directed by Anthony Minghella, from the novel by Michael Ondaatje, this long and searching movie tangles together a number of stories and characters: Almásy (Ralph Fiennes) and Katherine (Kristin Scott Thomas), who have an affair in North Africa before the Second World War; a French-Canadian nurse (Juliette Binoche) who cares for the badly burned Almásy after the war, and the Sikh soldier (Naveen Andrews) *she* has an affair with; and the mysterious Caravaggio (Willem Dafoe), a scavenging thief who appears to know the secrets of Almásy's past. The triumph of the film lies not just in the force and range of the performances but in Minghella's creation of an intimate epic: vast landscapes mingle with the minute details of desire, and the combination is transfixing.—A.L. (11/25/96) (Chelsea Cinemas, Embassy 3, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, New York Twin, and Village East Cinemas.)

The Evening Star—Fifteen years after the death of her daughter, Aurora Greenway (Shirley MacLaine) deals with her rebellious grandchildren, in writer-director Robert Harling's sequel to "Terms of Endearment," based on Larry McMurtry's novel. (Art Greenwich Twin, East 85th Street, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, State, and 34th Street Showplace.)

Evita—At last, after years of rumor and negotiation—years that have made it almost as mythical as Eva Perón herself—the rock opera by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice comes to the screen. The problem is that it remains a rock opera by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice. There are moments when music and lyrics bear only the faintest relation to each other, a tricky state of affairs in a work that is almost bereft of spoken dialogue. This deficit is good news for Madonna, of course—she is barely required to speak or even to act, though she does suggest, rather convincingly, that Evita's outstanding talent was a capacity for growing into an early-model Madonna. The only voices of skepticism belong to Jonathan Pryce, as a sly and troubled Juan Perón, and Antonio Banderas, who prowls through the action as our friendly smoldering narrator. This is a thin tale—poor country girl makes good, and eventually makes the grade as a semi-saint—to which the director, Alan Parker, lends energy with frenzied cutting and vast crowds. The picture blares and blazes at you without letup, and it works best when it's openly theatrical—only when it's over do you sense how little lay beneath the busy surface. It's a movie with hidden shallows.—A.L. (1/6/97) (Lincoln Square. . . . ¶ Guild; starting Jan. 10.)

Ghosts of Mississippi—Alec Baldwin plays Bobby DeLaughter, the prosecutor who finally convicted Bryon De La Beckwith (James Woods) for the murder of the civil-rights activist Medgar Evers. With Whoopi Goldberg. Directed by Rob Reiner. (19th Street East 6, Village Theatre VII, and Ziegfeld.)

Hamlet—Kenneth Branagh directs and stars in this four-hour version of the tragedy. With Derek Jacobi, Julie Christie, Richard Briers, and Kate Winslet. (Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema.) (Paris.)

101 Dalmatians—The remake from hell. In the new live-action version, directed by Stephen Herek, the dogs no longer talk but merely cock their heads and bark; and the humans, led by Jeff Daniels and Joely Richardson, go through the whole affair with a sort of dazed, disbelieving look, as well they might. In her initial scenes as Cruella DeVil, Glenn Close displays a certain scarlet relish for her own monstrosity. But by the end, the charm and delicacy of the 1961 cartoon have long been replaced by laborious gross-outs. Is this now official Disney policy?—A.L. (12/9/96) (84th Street Sixplex, 86th Street East Twin, Gotham Cinema, Metro Cinema, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, and Village East Cinemas. . . . ¶ Guild; through Jan. 9. . . . ¶ Embassy 4; starting Jan. 10.)

I'm Not Rappaport—Herb Gardner directs his own adaptation of his 1985 play, about two old men (Walter Matthau and Ossie Davis) who meet daily on a bench in Central Park. (Regency.)

Jerry Maguire—Tom Cruise plays the title character, who is a glib, cocky agent for professional athletes. In the fluid opening scenes, the movie, which was written and directed by Cameron Crowe, promises to be something unusual—a comedy about the spiritual crisis of a shallow man. But the star quickly reverts to his familiar feisty, can-do shtick, and Crowe loses control of the fragile comic tone. Also with Renee Zellweger, Cuba Gooding, Jr., and Bonnie Hunt.—T.R. (12/16/96) (Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, and Village East Cinemas.)

Mars Attacks!—There's a strong whiff of self-destructiveness in Tim Burton's surprisingly feeble alien-invasion comedy—of a desire to use an enormous budget and a glittering cast to as little purpose as possible. This movie is meant to be a kind of anti-entertainment: a subversion of everything that pictures like "Independence Day" represent. For Burton, cheesiness is next to godliness; unfortunately, his willful ineptitude isn't funny. With Jack Nicholson, Glenn Close, Annette Bening, Martin Short, Michael J. Fox, Sarah Jessica Parker, Pierce Brosnan, Danny DeVito, Rod Steiger, Lisa Marie, and Tom Jones (as himself).—T.R. (12/16/96) (Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, New York Twin, Olympia, Orpheum VII, State, and Village Theatre VII.)

Marvin's Room—The late Scott McPherson's adaptation of his 1990 play about a pair of sisters (Meryl Streep and Diane Keaton) who reunite when one of them becomes ill. Directed by Jerry Zaks. With Leonardo DiCaprio. (Lincoln Square.)

Message to Love: The Isle of Wight Festival—Murray Lerner's documentary on the legendary 1970 rock festival captures performances by, among others, Jim Morrison, Jimi Hendrix (about two weeks before his death), Leonard Cohen, Joni Mitchell, and The Who—just about all of them sensational. The film brilliantly documents the tensions between the promoters and the more than six hundred thousand fans, and it offers a fascinating glimpse into the fate of the rebellious and destructive rock of the sixties.—B.D. (Film Forum 3.)

Courtney Love and Woody Harrelson in "The People vs. Larry Flynt."

DAVID SMALL

Michael—Holiday candy from Nora Ephron, about a cynical tabloid reporter (William Hurt) who goes to Iowa to cover a story about an angel (John Travolta); it pointlessly reheats half a dozen old screwball and sentimental plots. The one new joke is that this angel is no halo-wearing, harp-strumming innocent: he specializes in fighting and sex. Travolta throws himself into it, but the script is so vulgar and sophomoric that it makes him look like an over-eager first-time actor. Andie MacDowell is the love interest.—S.K. (Beekman, Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

Mother—A comedy written and directed by Albert Brooks, who also stars, as a twice-divorced writer who moves back in with his mom (Debbie Reynolds). (Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and 72nd Street East.)

My Fellow Americans—Two former Presidents (Jack Lemmon and James Garner), long-time political enemies, join forces to clear their reputations, in a comedy directed by Peter Segal. Also starring Dan Aykroyd. (84th Street Sixplex, Metro Cinema, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, State, and Village East Cinemas.)

One Fine Day—The director, Michael Hoffman, tries for the cool, sassy swing of his earlier effort, "Soapdish," and the two gorgeous stars, Michelle Pfeiffer and George Clooney, create a good, smoky charge together. But Terrel Seltzer and Ellen Simon's bland and hackneyed script—about single parenting, stressful jobs, adorable kids, and cellular-phone confusion—goes nowhere. The big payoff is so mundane that the happy ending feels more like a letdown.—B.D. (Chelsea Cinemas, Coronet, Lincoln Square, National Twin, Orpheum VII, 34th St. East, and Village East Cinemas.)

The People vs. Larry Flynt—Milos Forman's film about the publisher of *Hustler* (Woody Harrelson), his wife (Courtney Love), and the First Amendment. (Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema.) (Chelsea West, Lincoln Square, and Village Theatre VII.)

The Portrait of a Lady—Henry James's most celebrated novel (and, in its range of emotional shading, one of his broadest) has become, under the guidance of director Jane Campion and screenwriter Laura Jones, an intense and lengthy monotone. Isabel Archer (Nicole Kidman) arrives in a sombre, repressive England, then travels to an Italy that's not much better; there she marries Gilbert Osmond (John Malkovich), even though anyone in the audience could tell her to steer clear. The film is far more obvious than the book: the longings and hatreds are spelled out for us, writ large in the unyielding gloom of the set designs. Campion seems not to believe in James's excitable moral adventuress; she substitutes a whey-faced victim to whom tragic things are destined to happen, leaving Kidman with no room to breathe. With Martin Donovan as Ralph Touchett, John Gielgud as Ralph's father, and Barbara Hershey, in what is easily the most potent performance in the picture, as the mysterious Madame Merle.—A.L. (1/6/97) (First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and Village Theatre VII.)

The Preacher's Wife—A remake of the 1947 Cary Grant–Loretta Young–David Niven comedy "The Bishop's Wife," with the magnetic Denzel Washington taking over for Grant as an angel trying to help a beleaguered preacher (Courtney B. Vance) and his wife (Whitney Houston), who is beginning to lose faith in their dry marriage. The first time around, the forbidden-love-triangle premise was a phony combination of titillation and prudery; this time, the emphasis is on moral uplift (Houston frequently breaks into gospel Christmas carols) and greater loyalty within the black community, and it's equally trite. Penny Marshall directs with her usual flatness, though at least she has the sense to linger on Washington's face as he marvels at the mortals—the wit and the emotion welling in his eyes are more wholesome than all the trite talk about faith. With Gregory Hines as a greedy developer who's forgotten where his roots are.—S.K. (Chelsea West, Cinema II, 84th Street Sixplex, Embassy 1, Embassy 2, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Showplace, and Village East Cinemas.)

Ransom—Ron Howard's grinding picture could have been a snappy little hostage thriller but decided, somewhere along the way, to take itself terribly seriously. Mel Gibson plays the wealthy owner of an airline, whose young son (Brawley Nolte) is kidnapped by a gang of good-for-nothings. Rene Russo suffers from a woefully underpowered role as the boy's mother, Gary Sinise struggles to convince us that he has the makings of a scuzzy villain, and Gibson himself has to stand there and act tragic in closeup.—A.L. (11/11/96) (84th Street Sixplex, 86th Street East Twin, Sutton, and Village East Cinemas. . . . ¶ Embassy 4; through Jan. 9.)

Ridicule—A country-bumpkin aristocrat (Charles Berling) travels to Versailles, but in order to get an audience with Louis XVI he must first learn to dance and outdo rival nobles in cruel contests of wit. Until the halfway point, Patrice Leconte's flawed but ingenious exploration of the quest for insider power depicts it as shabby, merciless, and burnout-inducing; then

Remi Waterhouse's screenplay buries the comedy's strong premise under a simplistic, ahistorical gloss that makes it feel like an intellectual "Rocky." In French.—S.K. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and 68th St. Playhouse.)

Scream—Wes Craven, who knows a good slasher from a bad one (he directed "Last House on the Left" and "A Nightmare on Elm Street"), pokes not so subtle fun at his own genre in this entertaining horror comedy. He and his scriptwriter, Kevin Williamson, take the clichés of fright films and reinvigorate them with a cheeky knowingness—the victims are horror-movie aficionados who in many instances make the same mistakes they've joked about seeing made on screen. With help from an unusually strong cast—Drew Barrymore, Neve Campbell, Courteney Cox, and David Arquette all do smashing work—Craven wrings some real thrills from the familiar perils of all those teen-age gorefests.—B.D. (Astor Plaza, Chelsea Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 62nd & Broadway, and Waverly.)

Secrets & Lies—Hortense (Marianne Jean-Baptiste), the heroine of Mike Leigh's broadest and most ambitious film to date, decides after the death of her adoptive mother to seek her biological one. The quest turns up Cynthia (Brenda Blethyn), who freaks out: Hortense *is middle-class and black, Cynthia* working-class and white. Jean-Baptiste gives a quiet, pacific performance; Blethyn deals in spasms of exaggeration which belong in another film altogether. Still, there is a fine supporting cast, and they all gather in the final scene, a cathartic barbecue that starts off as nicely choreographed light comedy and darkens to a Bergman-like chorus of wailing women and slightly overcooked dialogue.—A.L. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Shine—The hero of Scott Hicks's absorbing biographical film is the Australian concert pianist David Helfgott (played, at different stages of his life, by Alex Rafalowicz, Noah Taylor, and Geoffrey Rush), who suffered a severe breakdown, spent years in mental institutions, and then, improbably, resumed his career. Although the movie's swiftness and lightness are pleasing, the over-all image they create is indistinct: it just evaporates in your head when the lights come up. Also with Armin Mueller-Stahl, Lynn Redgrave, and John Gielgud (who's in especially buoyant comic form).—T.R. (12/2/96) (Angelika Film Center, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema I, Cinema 3rd Avenue, and Lincoln Square.)

Some Mother's Son—A picture that traces the friendship of two Irish women (Helen Mirren and Fionnula Flanagan) whose sons have joined the 1981 I.R.A. hunger strike at Maze Prison. Directed by Terry George, who co-wrote the screenplay with Jim Sheridan. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Square.)

Space Jam—Produced by Ivan Reitman and more assembled than directed by Joe Pytka, this big-budget attempt at a merchandising bonanza doesn't begin to approach the artistry of "Who Framed Roger Rabbit": the cartoon characters never seem fully integrated into the live action—they just hang there. The story, in which Michael Jordan, the basketball superstar, saves Bugs Bunny and friends from aliens who want them for their Disney-like amusement park, sacrifices the anarchic spirit of Chuck Jones, who animated the Warner Bros. classics of the forties and fifties, to the current Warners marketing team in ways so obvious that they make Disney look humble.—B.D. (Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, Metro Cinemas, and 19th Street East 6.)

Thieves (Les Voleurs)—A thriller from André Téchiné, about a French policeman (Daniel Auteuil), his brother (Didier Bezace), the brother's mistress (Laurence Côte), and the mistress's lover (Catherine Deneuve). In French. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

The Whole Wide World—The relationship of Novalyne Price Ellis (Renee Zellweger) and the writer Robert E. Howard (Vincent D'Onofrio) in the nineteen-thirties is the basis for a film directed by Dan Ireland. (Carnegie Hall Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

ALSO PLAYING

BOUND: Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **THE FIRST WIVES CLUB:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **THE FUNERAL:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **THE GARDEN OF THE FINZI-CONTINIS:** Quad Cinema. . . . **JINGLE ALL THE WAY:** Criterion Center and Waverly. . . . **LOOKING FOR RICHARD:** Sutton. . . . **MICHAEL COLLINS** (reviewed in our issue of 10/14/96): First & 62nd Cinemas. . . . **SET IT OFF:** Criterion Center. . . . **SLEEPERS** (11/4/96): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **SLING BLADE:** Angelika Film Center. . . . **STAR TREK: FIRST CONTACT** (12/9/96): Criterion Center and First & 62nd Cinemas. . . . **SWINGERS:** Carnegie Hall Cinemas, The Screening Room, and Sutton. . . . **WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S ROMEO & JULIET:** 59th Street East Cinema and Worldwide Cinemas.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

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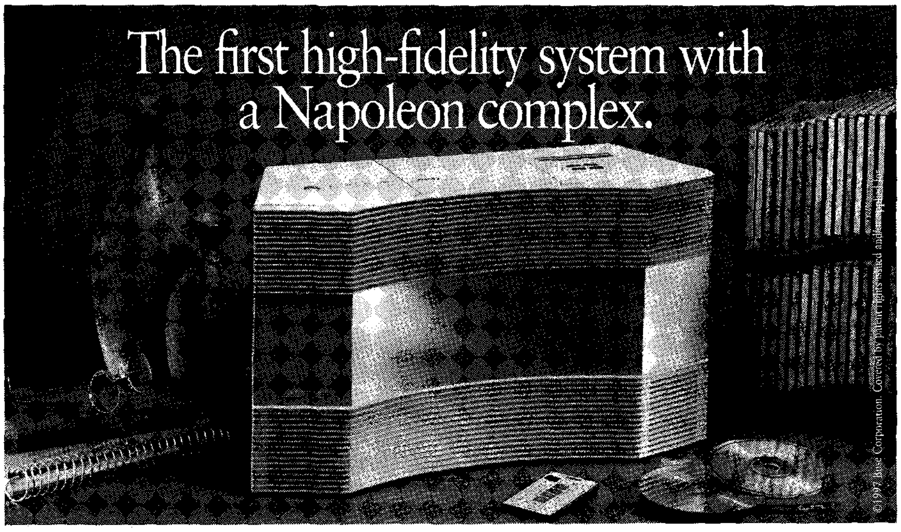
(For show times, call 777-FILM, except where noted.)

Angelika 57, 225 W. 57th St.
Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
Baronet, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Carnegie Hall Cinemas, Seventh Ave. between 56th and 57th Sts.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3, 2 W. 59th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St.
Coronet, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Criterion Center, Broadway at 44th St.
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
Eastside Playhouse, Third Ave. at 55th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
86th Street East Twin, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Embassy I, Broadway at 46th St.
Embassy 2, 3, and 4, Seventh Ave. at 47th St.
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
Gotham Cinema, Third Ave. at 58th St.
Guild, 33 W. 50th St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St. (757-2280).
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Manhattan Twin, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Metro Cinema I and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
National Twin, Broadway at 44th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St.
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
Regency, Broadway at 67th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
68th St. Playhouse, Third Ave. at 68th St.
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sutton I and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34th St. East, 241 E. 34th St.
34th Street Showplace, 238 E. 34th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Waverly I and 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
Worldwide Cinemas, 50th St. between Eighth and Ninth Aves.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.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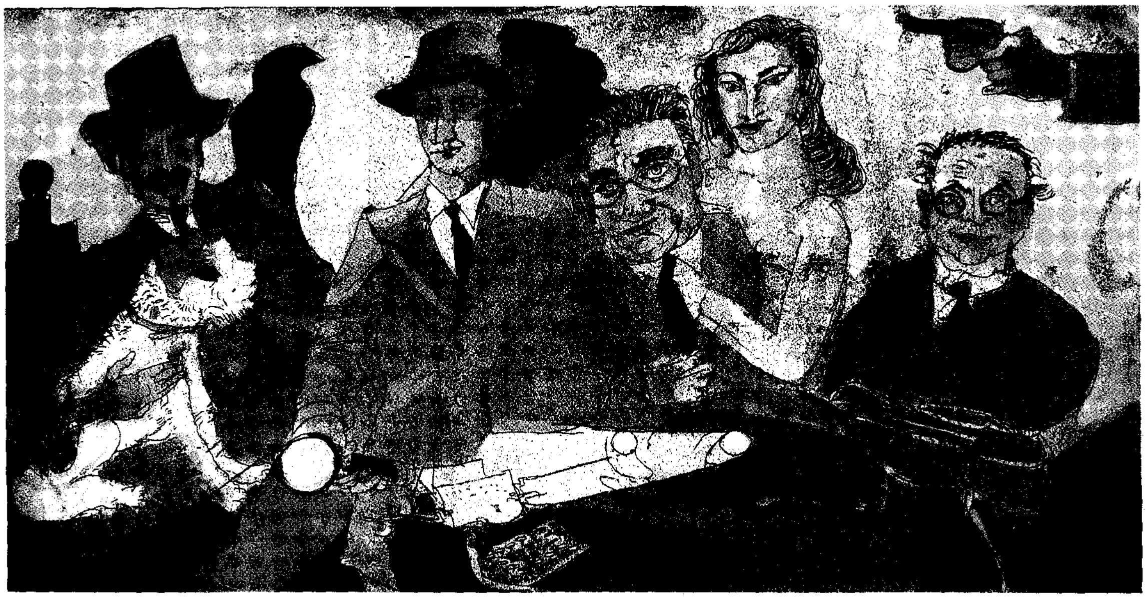
REVIVALS

(The following notes are by Pauline Kael and Michael Sragow. Theatre addresses and phone numbers appear with the listings following these notes.)

The Big Sleep (1946)—Humphrey Bogart is Raymond Chandler's private eye in this witty, incredibly complicated thriller. (Chandler reported that while the film was in production William Faulkner and the other screenwriters had to appeal to him for guidance on the plot, and apparently Chandler couldn't exactly figure it out either.) The characters are a collection of sophisticated monsters—blackmailers, pornographers, apathetic society girls (Lauren Bacall and Martha Vickers are a baffling pair of spoiled sisters; the latter sucks her thumb), drug addicts, nymphomaniacs (a brunette Dorothy Malone seduces the hero in what must surely be record time), murderers. Howard Hawks directed—and so well that you may even enjoy the fact that, as he says, "neither the author, the writer, nor myself knew who had killed whom."—P.K. (Film Forum 2; starting Jan. 10.)



Starting January 10, at Film Forum 2, a five-week series of noir pictures based on novels by Dashiell Hammett, Cornell Woolrich (a.k.a. William Irish), James M. Cain, and Raymond Chandler.

ROBERT ANDREW PARKER

The Diary of a Country Priest (1950)—Robert Bresson's masterly adaptation of the Georges Bernanos novel about the suffering of a young priest (Claude Laydu) whose faith is neither understood nor accepted by his parishioners. A film of great purity and, at the end, a Bach-like intensity, this is one of the few modern works in any art form which help one to understand the religious life. If there is a flaw in the film it's the rhythm—you feel you're dying with the priest. The film may raise a question in your mind: Does Bresson know what a pain this young man is? In French.—P.K. (Anthology Film Archives; Jan. 14.)

Nuts in May (1976)—In this barbed look at rural holidays, Mike Leigh enters Jacques Tati territory and comes up with something completely different but just as diverting. It begins with two clean-living vegetarians on a camping trip in Dorset: Keith (Roger Sloman) is a cerebral, type-A-plus personality; Candice Marie (Alison Steadman) is a gentle, whimsical, browbeaten folkie. Together they subject us to episodes of educational touring and even an impromptu hootenanny before their downfall comes in the form of a couple of carnivores, Honky (Sheila Kellen) and Finger (Stephen Bill), who have the nerve to cook sausages on an open fire at the campsite. The irony of nature lovers' running smack into what for them are the more perilous hazards of *human* nature gets more ticklish as the film goes on. This may be a larking sort of film in the Leigh canon, but it has a satiric wit that slithers over you like a creepy-crawler.—M.S. (Anthology Film Archives; Jan. 10.)

The Shameless Old Lady (1965)—An agreeable though thin comedy about how an old lady discovers the pleasures of the modern world after her husband's death. A little too lulling and gratifying; it encourages the audience to chuckle in condescension at miserliness and meanness. With that great old screen-stealer Sylvie occupying center stage for a change. Written and directed by René Allio; based on a story by Brecht. In French.—P.K. (Florence Gould Hall; Jan. 14.)

The Time Machine (1960)—Entertaining George Pal sci-fi, loosely derived from the H. G. Wells novel and set at about the time the book was written—1895. The plush Victorian furnishings in the home of the time-travelling scientist (Rod Taylor) are contrasted with the catacombs of the cannibalistic future, where Yvette Mimieux is a dainty morsel on the menu. The time-travel effects help to make this film one of the best of its kind; however, it deteriorates into comic-strip grotesqueries when the fat, ogreish future race of Morlocks torments the effete, platinum-blond, vacant-eyed race of Eloi. With Alan Young, Sebastian Cabot, and Whit Bissell.—P.K. (Walter Reade Theatre; Jan. 11.)

LATE RUNS, CLASSICS, ETC.

(Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.)

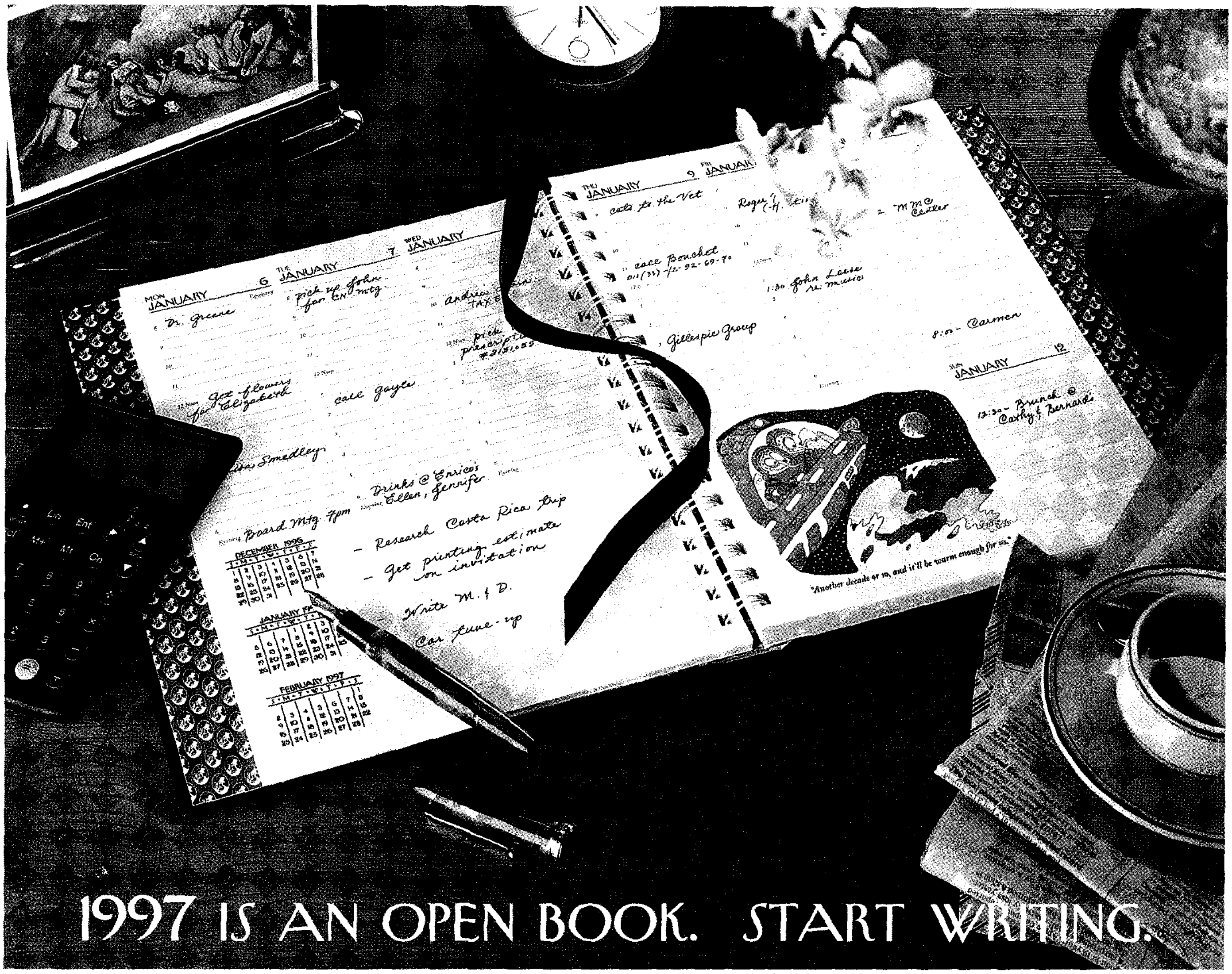
Film Forum 2, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—Through Jan. 9: "Walkabout" (1971, Nicolas Roeg). . . . ¶ Starting Jan. 10, a five-week series of film noir based on novels by Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, Cornell Woolrich, and James M. Cain. From Jan. 10: "The Big Sleep" (†).

Museum of Modern Art, Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—Jan. 9 at 2:30: "Jassy" (1947, Bernard Knowles). . . . Jan. 9 at 3 and 6: "Bontoc Eulogy" (1995, Marlon Fuentes). . . . Jan. 9 at 6:30: "Hurry Sundown" (1967, Otto Preminger). . . . Jan. 10 at 3 and 6 and Jan. 11 at 5: Three different programs from "The March of Time" newsreel series. . . . Jan. 10 at 6:30: "U.S. Go Home" (1994, Claire Denis; in French). . . . Jan. 10 at 8 and Jan. 11 at 2:30: "The Show Goes On—The Indian Chapter" (1996, Mrinal Sen). . . . Jan. 10 at 8:15: "Wild Reeds" (1994, André Téchiné; in French). . . . Jan 11 at 2: "Portrait of a Young Woman at the End of the Sixties, in Brussels" (1994, Chantal Akerman; in French). . . . Jan. 11 at 5: "Cold Water" (1994, Olivier Assayas; in French). . . . Jan. 12 at 2: "Travolta and Me" (1994, Patricia Mazuy; in French). . . . Jan. 12 at 2:30: "Prelude to War" (1942, Frank Capra) and "The Nazis Strike" (1942, Capra and Anatole Litvak). . . . Jan. 12 at 5: "Too Much Happiness" (1994, Cédric Kahn; in French). . . . Jan. 12 at 5: "Divide and Conquer" (1943, Capra and Litvak) and "The Battle of Britain" (1943, Anthony Veiller). . . . Jan. 13 at 2:30: "Peace and Love" (1994, Laurence Ferreira Barbosa; in French, with no English subtitles). . . . Jan. 13 at 3: "The Battle of Russia" (1943, Litvak). . . . Jan. 13 at 6 and Jan. 14 at 2:30: "L'Incruste" (1994, Emilie Deleuze; in French, with no English subtitles). . . . Jan. 13 at 6:30: A program of films by avant-garde Austrian filmmakers. . . . Jan. 14 at 3: "The Battle of China" (1944, Capra and Litvak). . . . Jan. 14 at 6: "Brothers" (1994, Olivier Dahan; in French). . . . Jan. 14 at 6: "War Comes to America" (1945, Litvak) and "The Negro Soldier" (1944, Stuart Heisler and Capra).

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (875-5600)—A program of Italian films by Mario Monicelli; in Italian, with English subtitles. Jan. 8 at 2 and 6:30: "My Friends" (1975). . . . Jan. 8 at 4:15 and 8:45 and Jan. 9 at 2 and 6:30: "Dear Michael" (1976). . . . Jan. 9 at 4:15 and 8:30: "We Want the Colonels" (1972). . . . Jan. 10 at 2 and 6:30 and Jan. 11 at 4: "A Very Little Man" (1977). . . . Jan. 10 at 4:15 and 8:45 and Jan. 11 at 6:15: "Let's Hope It's a Girl" (1985). . . . ¶ Jan. 11 at 2: "The Time Machine" (†). . . . ¶ From Jan. 12: The Sixth Annual New York Jewish Film/Video Festival.

Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—Jan. 14 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9: "The Shameless Old Lady" (†).

Anthology Film Archives, 32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5110)—Jan. 8 at 7: "A Day in the Country" (1936, Jean Renoir; in French) and "La Règle et l'Exception—Jean Renoir" (1967, André Labarthe; in French). . . . ¶ Jan. 8 at 8 and Jan. 9 at 8:30: "Out of the Present" (1995, Andrei Ujica). . . . ¶ A program of films by Mike Leigh. Jan. 8 at 10: "Hard Labour" (1973). . . . Jan. 10 at 10: "Nuts in May" (†). . . . Jan. 12 at 9:30: "Who's Who?" (1979). . . . ¶ Jan. 9 at 7 and 9: "In the Realm of the Senses" (1976, Nagisa Oshima; in Japanese). . . . ¶ Jan. 10 at 7, Jan. 11-12 at 5 and 7, and Jan. 13-14 at 7: "Through the Olive Trees" (1994, Abbas Kiarostami). . . . ¶ Jan. 10 at 8 and Jan. 12 at 6:30: Two programs of films by Harry Smith. . . . ¶ A program of films by Sacha Guitry; in French, with English subtitles. Jan. 10 at 9 and Jan. 11 at 9:30: "Le Poison" (1951). . . . Jan. 12 at 9: "The Story of a Cheat" (1936). . . . Jan. 13 at 9: "Si Versailles M'Était Conté" (1953). . . . Jan. 14 at 9: "Les Trois Font la Paire" (1957). . . . ¶ Jan. 11-12 at 2: "A Personal Journey with Martin Scorsese Through American Movies" (1995). . . . ¶ Jan. 11 at 7: "Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania" (1971, Jonas Mekas). . . . ¶ Jan. 11 at 9:45: "Landscape in the Mist" (1988, Theo Angelopoulos). . . . ¶ Jan. 14 at 7:30: "Diary of a Country Priest" (†).



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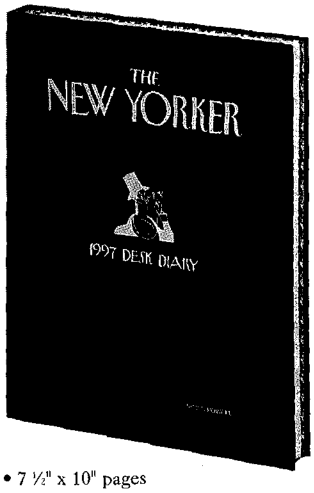

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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

MILLENNIAL MALAISE

In 1991, the actress Kathryn Walker began asking people whether they thought that the year 2000 was a significant date and then recorded their responses on videotape. The conversations often lasted an hour or more, and the archive she now has is enormous. She has interviewed perhaps a hundred and thirty people, including Hamilton Fish, Stockard Channing, Jonathan Miller, Stewart Udall, André Gregory, Noam Chomsky, Joni Mitchell, and Wilma Mankiller. She calls the archive the Millennium Project, and she plans to add to it right up to the end of the century.

Ms. Walker has a strong jaw, reddish-brown hair, dark eyes, and a smoky voice. "In 1991, I had just done an independent film in which I played an independent filmmaker," she says, "and I was struck by the sense that this very short era—America from the Second World War to the present—is sliding away, and it's very hard to know what's replacing it. Everyone is terrified of the disorder. In the early interviews, people were unnerved by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Berlin Wall, and they seemed to dwell as much on the past as talk about the future. There was a sense of hopelessness that eventually gave way not to optimism, exactly, but to something slightly more promising. Anyway, I have come to feel that the people I've filmed are sort of inventing the future by attempting to describe it."

Ms. Walker would like to show the tapes in a museum during 1999. She imagines the exhibit as a series of television screens, each devoted to the words and image of a particular person, with some of the screens left blank, to be filled in as the final interviews of the decade are completed. Not long ago, she finished compiling a tape that includes selections from all the interviews she has done so far. The late Michael O'Donoghue, who wrote for the screen and for TV's "Saturday Night Live," described the significance of the future by saying, "The year 2000 will bring rule by multinational corporations that will make you nostalgic for nationalism—the old Rudyard Kipling, 'Let's fight for the White Cliffs of Dover' sort of thing, which seemed evil at the time, but these corporations will gladly grind up the White Cliffs of Dover to make gravel for your driveway, without a second's hesitation, for the highest bidder."

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ERIC PALMA

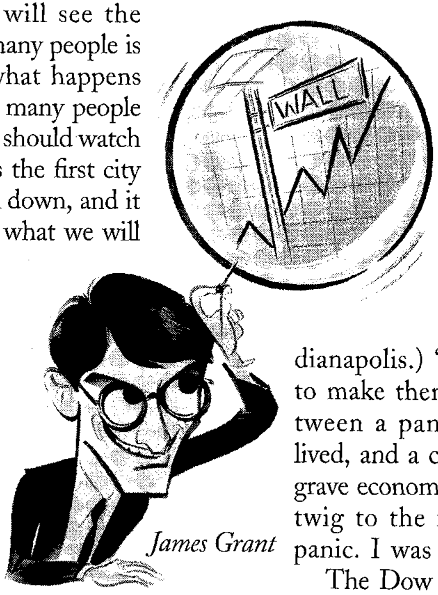
Lyn Austin, the theatrical producer, said that when the millennium arrives "the rules as they have been laid out aren't going to work anymore. What's going to work is, do you have enough imagination and ability to make something happen that you can't see realistically how to do."

Andrew Weil, the writer and physician, said, "I'll make two predictions: The first place that we will see the consequence of too many people is India. And to see what happens when you crowd too many people into a city, I think we should watch Mexico City. That is the first city that is going to break down, and it will be the model of what we will see in other cities."

Fran Lebowitz, the writer, said, "The best-case scenario for me and the millennium is that the smoking works, and I don't have to be there. I think it's astonishing how people just want to live long lives now. For what? We're all just getting more and more depressed by the second. I don't think, Well, my thirties were depressing, my forties were depressing, my fifties are going to be great. . . . Everyone I know is obsessed with living forever. They don't eat anything, they don't drink anything, they don't smoke, and they spend twenty-four hours a day exercising so that they can preside over this hideous disintegration of everything. I'm not happy to be in my forties compared to how I felt when I was twenty-one, but I'm happy to be in my forties as opposed to, say, ten or eleven."

GRANT'S TOMB

James Grant talks about Wall Street calamities the way epicures discuss fine wines—from the Crash of '29 to the Panic of '87, when the Dow lost more than five hundred glorious points in a single session. "It was a lovely day," he recalls. "The quality of sunlight was especially touching. It was rather like skimmed milk." The day after the disaster he stood atop a CBS sound truck ready to tell Dan Rather that the worst was yet to come. (He was preëmpted by a plane crash in Indianapolis.) "The big distinction to make then," he says, "was between a panic, which is short-lived, and a crash, which portends grave economic disruption. I didn't twig to the fact that this was a panic. I was in the crash camp."



James Grant

The Dow Jones has more than

tripled since then, but Grant remains Wall Street's most eloquent Grinch. He tells anyone who asks—from billionaire hedge-fund managers to Ted Koppel—that the market is "overblown, overvalued, overpriced," that we are witnessing a speculative bubble of historic proportions, and that it is only a matter of time before the bubble bursts. He has been saying the same thing in his own newsletter, *Grant's Interest Rate Observer*, for more years than he cares to remember, and he has just published a book called "The Trouble with Prosperity," in which he offers the reasons.

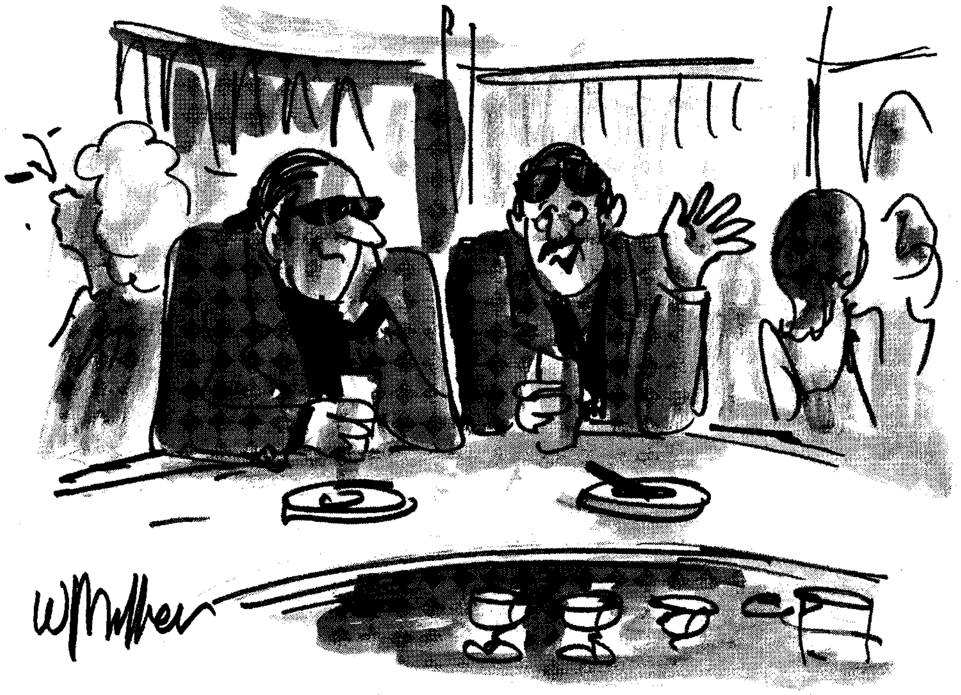
"At some level of valuation, the public will run out of money, the market will begin sinking as people judiciously lighten up, and there will be a bear market, as there have always been bear markets in the past," Grant said during a recent lunch at La Tour D'Or, a downtown restaurant. Wearing thick horn-rims, the pinstripes of a natty banker, and slightly worn oxfords, Grant, who stands six feet five, ordered a bull-market meal: baked Brie, chicken cordon bleu, and a Diet Coke.

It has become fashionable among many Wall Street types to say that the market, in the confident post-Cold War, baby-boom era, will rise forever. This so-called "new paradigm" view is similar to Francis Fukuyama's "end of history" argument, and Grant, who's a historian of sorts, doesn't buy it. He believes that stocks are a fine long-term investment but that economic cycles are inherent in the market's workings, just as they are in any business. Taking a position that is heretical on the Street, he sharply criticized the chairman of the Federal Reserve System, Alan Greenspan, for keeping interest rates too low for too long. The consequence, he said, is that the public has been lulled into believing that the market is on a continuous upward curve, that the world is safe for speculation, when, in fact, downturns are not only inevitable but healthy.

But the long Dow rampage has left him a little shaken. "Nothing is impossible in markets," he said. "Is there a new paradigm? No! Could there be? Yeah." Still, over the years, Grant has made numerous correct calls, many of them way too early for anyone to profit by. He is both liked and respected on the Street. ("Jim's so erudite and knowledgeable," one money manager says. "I'm always afraid I'll take his advice.") He predicted Michael Milken's fall as early as 1984, and he forecast the real-estate excesses of the late eighties as well as Japan's economic nosedive. Milken once personally tried to influence Grant's bearish views. "He was brilliant but unprepossessing," Grant recalled. "He showed up in an off-the-rack blazer that was kind of dandruff littered." What does he think of Milken now? "I think he's really, really rich," Grant said in a friendly voice.

Grant, who is fifty, calls himself a "happy skeptic." A topnotch classical horn player in his youth, he drifted into journalism after a stint in the Navy during the Vietnam War. He said that he considers himself a writer first, and he turned a little glum when asked about his own investments. In 1989, he sold his Brooklyn Heights co-op and used the proceeds to short various banking stocks, which eventually rocketed up. He owns gold shares now, and this summer he shorted Saks department store, which didn't work out, either. "We've been nose-pressed against the glass, looking in on this party, for what has it been now, fifty years?" he said.

But there's always a market for skepticism, especially in this hyper-bullish environment. His publications, which include, besides the newsletter, *Grant's Asia Observer* and *Grant's Municipal Bond Observer*, operate from the old boardroom of a bankrupt Wall Street bank. Reaching nearly forty-five hundred subscribers, they have never been more prosperous. In 1996, he correctly predicted that commodities would go up and the Swiss franc down; now, with the current unrest in South Korea, he expects that market to be a really good buy. As for the Dow, he imagines all sorts of grizzly scenarios. What if interest rates take off, corporate earnings dip, and all that new mutual-fund money takes flight? "Then there will be a break in the market, and New York City will become a much less well-lit place," he said, picking crumbs from his lap. And 1997 could be that rare thing: one of James Grant's really good years.



"Oh, and Botticelli. Botticelli would have been a great filmmaker."

JUST CLICK NO

Some doctors, like Thomas Hodgkin, are celebrated for identifying a disease; others, like Jonas Salk, for defeating one. But Dr. Ivan K. Goldberg may be the first in his field to gain notoriety for naming a disease that he says doesn't exist. Dr. Goldberg, a burly, bearded Upper East Side psychiatrist, allots two hours each day to browsing the bulletin boards of PsyCom.Net, a cyberclub for shrinks which he founded in 1986. Two years ago, he decided to play a little joke on the members by posting a parody of the American Psychiatric Association's "Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of

Mental Disorders." To demonstrate the handbook's complexity and rigidity, he conjured up something called "Internet addiction disorder" (I.A.D.), the symptoms of which included "important social or occupational activities that are given up or reduced because of Internet use," "fantasies or dreams about the Internet," and "voluntary or involuntary typing movements of the fingers."

Much to Dr. Goldberg's surprise, several colleagues admitted to "netaholism" and E-mailed for help. Dr. Goldberg indulged his suffering peers, setting up the Internet Addiction Support Group on-line. Word of the group spread faster than a computer virus. Hundreds of self-described addicts—some claiming to surf the Net twelve hours a day—posted their pain. "I did have a RL (real life) prior to this 'electronic take-over,'" one user bemoaned. "My computer's keyboard has worn off after less than a year." Another confessed, "I've been thinking of getting a second home phone installed in order to be able to talk to my family once in a while. I currently subscribe to eighty-nine newsgroups."

Concern about excessive Internet use began cropping up in other places. The University of Maryland at College Park offered a counselling group, called Caught in the Net, for students. McLean Hospital, the renowned mental-health facility in Belmont, Massachusetts, established a new clinic for computer junkies. Dr. Kimberly Young, an assistant professor of psychology at the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford, announced the formation of a Center for On-Line Addiction to help corporations ferret out employees who point and click compulsively. In a recent article in the *Times*, Dr. Young was quoted as calling for the American Psychiatric Association to give official recognition to the disorder—an action that would pave the way for insurance companies to reimburse addicts for therapy. ("Unlikely," commented Dr. Patricia Isbell Ordorica, chairwoman of the A.P.A.'s council on addiction psychiatry.) In the past year, at least two more Internet-addiction support groups have sprung up.

Meanwhile, the medical pioneer behind I.A.D. is alarmed by what he has, in part, wrought. Speaking the other day from a rocking chair in his Lexington Avenue office, where he specializes in the treatment of manic-depressives, Dr. Goldberg said that since last July he has redefined I.A.D. as "pathological Internet-use disorder." He explained, "I.A.D. is a very unfortunate term. It makes it sound as if one were dealing with heroin, a truly addicting substance that can alter almost every cell in the body. To medicalize every behavior by putting it into psychiatric nomenclature is ridiculous. If you expand the concept of addiction to include everything people can overdo, then you must talk about people being addicted to books, addicted to jogging, addicted to other people."

Although Dr. Goldberg said, with a chuckle, that having an I.A.D. support group "makes about as much sense as having a support group for coughers," he remains a contributor to the Internet addicts' forum. Unconcerned that he might be regarded as an "enabler," he posts a message to members every six months or so. "I try to remind people that they need to look at why they are on-line," he said. "People should get themselves into psychotherapy and work out why they hide behind a keyboard. But most people just tell me to buzz off."

SHALL WE DANCE?

Cigar

CIGAR is bored. Accustomed to a particularly intense schedule of training and racing over the past two years—a regimen that recently culminated in farewell appearances at Madison Square Garden and Churchill Downs—America's superhorse is now in a stall at Ashford Stud, in Versailles, Kentucky, without a whole lot to do. He won't be racing anymore, thrilling fans with his fluid, ground-devouring stride and inspiring bumper stickers, T-shirts, and Presidential campaigns. In a few weeks, he will begin breeding duties as one of ten stallions at Ashford, the thoroughbred farm owned by Ireland's Coolmore. Suddenly just one of the boys, and an untested one at that, he is the subject of endless speculation and the unwavering optimism that is the turbocharger of the racing industry. His handlers are busy studying prospective mares' pedigrees and wheeling and dealing. The horse himself is idle.

Visitors will find Cigar temporarily isolated from his future stablemates, among them the 1995 Kentucky Derby and Belmont Stakes winner Thunder Gulch and an Argentine import, Southern Halo, sire of thirty-four stakes winners. Cigar's solitude in the gleaming facility is poignant: ears pricked forward sharply, he briefly studies newcomers and then assumes that inward, preoccupied expression horses show when they seem to be elsewhere mentally. He gives a just deposited pile of his own dung more than casual attention; farm personnel correct him gently but firmly, whisking away the offending object. Led from his stall to a courtyard, Cigar shifts on his feet, testing the wind, tasting scents, and gazing into far paddocks. The visitors' inspection lasts a few minutes, and the horse is returned to his stall. Paraic Dolan, one of the Ashford farm managers who guide Cigar fans on tours, said that the Thanksgiving weekend produced a deluge of visitors. He added that awestruck parents gaped at the bay stallion, while their children were inclined to wander off.

Billed as "America's Racehorse" during his 1996 campaign, in which he matched Citation's record of sixteen consecutive wins, Cigar travelled to racetracks all over the country, and even to Dubai, in a strongly hyped and now thoroughly documented production. As the Cigar show gained momentum, in early summer, the horse kept racking up the miles by plane, by van, and on the track, delivering a performance wherever he went. Even late-season defeats, including a narrow loss in his final race—the Breeders' Cup Classic at Woodbine, in Ontario—failed to diminish his mythic stature.

Paraic Dolan says that in another month life will become much more exciting for the horse, and that he will "learn what it's all about." Between the fifteenth of February and the thirtieth of June, Cigar is expected to "cover" seventy-five to eighty mares, at a fee of seventy-five thousand dollars for each live foal produced. As the saying goes in Bluegrass Country, "His dance card is full." ♦

"Millennial Malaise," Alec Wilkinson; "Grant's Tomb," Adam Platt; "Just Click No," David Wallis; "Shall We Dance?," Harriet Fowler.

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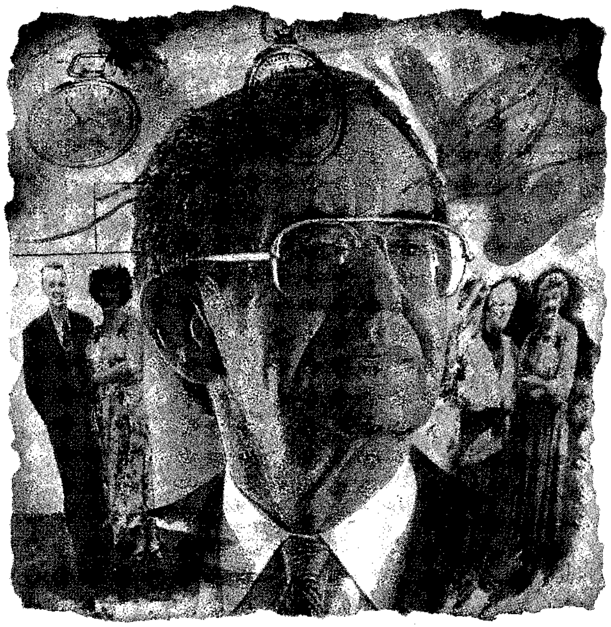
DEPT. OF DISPUTATION

SPOOKING THE BOOMERS

The Social Security critic Pete Peterson has whole segments of America fearing an impoverished old age. Do his figures add up?

BY JOHN CASSIDY



Peterson: "I'm a son of Greek immigrants, my parents started out very poor, and I want to preserve the safety net."

J.W. STEWART/ERICH HARTMANN/MAGNUM PHOTO

In early 1935, President Franklin D. Roosevelt sent a proposal to Capitol Hill that was intended to provide "some measure of protection to the average citizen . . . against poverty-ridden old age." The plan was controversial—Alf Landon, who became the Republican Presidential candidate the following year, labelled it a "cruel hoax" that was "unjust," "unworkable," and "wastefully financed"—but Roosevelt was able to force it through a skeptical Congress, and Social Security, as the new program was called, eventually became the most successful of all the New Deal reforms. Six decades later, the program is as popular as ever, but once again some voices are questioning its viability. The most persistent, and arguably the most influential, of these voices belongs to Peter G. Peterson, the investment banker who was once Richard Nixon's Secretary of Commerce. Peterson, a seventy-year-old native of Nebraska, has enjoyed a flourishing career on Wall Street since leaving Washington. In 1985, he co-founded the Blackstone Group, which is now a small but highly successful investment firm. His first essay on the perils that Social Security posed to the nation appeared in the *New York Review of Books* fifteen years ago, and he has since published a series of widely read pieces (one of them won a National Magazine Award) and three books, the latest of which bears the title "Will America Grow Up Before It Grows Old?" and the subtitle "How the Coming Social Security Crisis Threatens You, Your Family, and Your Country."

Peterson wants to transform Social Security by introducing a two-tiered system of means-tested retirement benefits supplemented by compulsory private savings accounts. This is an extremely radical proposal, but Peterson's ideas are taken seriously in Washington. In 1994, he was appointed by Congress to its Bipartisan Commission on Entitlement and Tax Reform (better known as the Kerrey-Danforth Commission). As a Republican willing to criticize Reaganomics, he has remained credible to Democrats, and he is popular among professional economists for his commitment to fiscal reform. He is the president of the Concord Coalition, an influential pressure group that supports balanced budgets and government-spending cuts, and the chairman of both the Council on Foreign Relations and the Institute for International Economics, two of the nation's leading think tanks. He also has close links to a number of leading journalists—in the acknowledgments in his latest book he thanks Diane Sawyer, Cynthia McFadden, Marie Brenner, Judy Miller, and Liz Smith.

Peterson has performed a public service in raising the issue of how the country will finance the aging of the baby boomers, but his analysis of the challenges facing Social Security is questionable. Many experts and policymakers believe that he has exaggerated the problems of the retirement system, using misleading arguments and deceptive statistics to support his case for reform. "He goes too far in scaring the hell out of people, as though there were no communal way out of this—he is guilty of scare tactics on that," Barry Bosworth, an economist at the Brookings Institution, says. Laura D'Andrea Tyson, the former head of the National Economic Council, told me, "Social Security doesn't face an impending crisis. It faces some understandable and predictable challenges that can be solved. I am concerned that creating a crisis atmosphere impedes the process of finding appropriate solutions."

PETERSON spends a lot of time detailing Social Security's problems, but he rarely mentions its successes. As recently as the nineteen-fifties, poverty rates among the elderly were more than double those of the population at large. Tens of millions of old people were dependent on the charity of their children and on the spotty largesse of local assistance programs. In 1995, the poverty rate among people over sixty-five was just 10.5 per cent, which means that old people are now no more likely to be poor than are members of any other age group. (In fact, they are far less likely to be in poverty than the young are.) Part of this progress can be attributed to the country's having become more prosperous in general, but most of it is a direct result of Social Security, which covers more than ninety per cent of all retirees. Government statistics suggest that without Social Security about half of the elderly would have incomes below the official poverty line.

Peterson doesn't dwell on the daily workings of the Social Security system, either, but they are worth considering. Currently, the average single retired worker receives a monthly check of $745 from the government. These checks are financed by payroll taxes on 142 million workers. The Social Security tax is 12.4 per cent on earnings of up to $65,400, and another 2.9 per cent is added for Medicare—which provides health care for the elderly—bringing the total payroll tax to 15.3 per cent. Of this figure, half is deducted from workers' paychecks and the other half is paid by employers. (Self-employed people pay both halves of the payroll tax.)

Many people mistakenly believe that they are contributing to a retirement "account" when they pay Social Security taxes. In fact, each generation of workers pays for the pensions of the generation ahead of it, and its pensions are subsequently paid for by the generation of workers behind it—a financing arrangement known as "pay as you go."

Peterson calls this system a "vast Ponzi scheme," but the fact that retirement costs are passed on to the next generation can provide great advantages. As long as the population keeps growing and wages keep rising, the economy's tax base will expand over time, and the country can afford to pay retirement benefits that are much higher than the payroll taxes the recipients paid during their working lives. This is what has happened for more than sixty years. The average single worker who retired at age sixty-five in 1980 could expect to receive about $70,000 more in retirement checks than he paid into the system in payroll taxes.

This pay-as-you-go financing runs into trouble only if the workforce stops growing or wages stop rising. Unfortunately, both of these things are now happening. If current trends persist, by the year 2040 there will be fewer than two taxpaying workers for every retiree. (Now there are 3.3.) Moreover, the earnings of those people who are working are expected to grow more slowly in the next fifty years than they did in the postwar era. It doesn't take much arithmetic to see that these trends will put pressure on Social Security. But the key question is: How much pressure?

Peterson is resolutely alarmist. "Social Security now has a small annual cash surplus but will begin to run large annual cash deficits around 2015," he writes. "By 2040, the cost of Social Security and Medicare is projected to rise from 17% to between 35% and 55% of workers' payroll." Even that isn't the end of it. "On our current path," he goes on to say, "entitlements will eventually consume all federal revenue, leaving nothing to pay for interest on the national debt, much less defense, education, and other discretionary expenditures."

If these figures are accepted at face value, it is tempting to agree with Peterson that the country is in dire trouble. Even one of the country's leading economists made this error. Reviewing Peterson's new book in the *Times*, Paul Krugman, of M.I.T., wrote, "We are drifting inexorably towards crisis; if you think 30 years ahead, you wonder whether the Republic can be saved." Three weeks later, writing in the on-line magazine *Slate*, Krugman felt obliged to issue a mea culpa. "I was the economist who went overboard in supporting Pete Peterson's positions on entitlements and demographics," he admitted. "I broke my own rule that you should always check an argument both with a back-of-the-envelope calculation and by consulting with the real experts, no matter how plausible and reasonable its author sounds."

THE most basic flaw in Peterson's analysis is that he tends to lump together Social Security and Medicare, and present them as a single, all-enveloping crisis, when they are actually two different programs that are financed separately and have their own distinct problems. It is only by including projections for Medicare spending—which are truly alarming, because of the rising cost of health care—that Peterson is able to generate his prediction that entitlement spending, if it is unchecked, will eventually swallow the bulk of the federal budget. In fact, two-thirds of the cost increase that Peterson details is accounted for by higher spending on health care. Only a third is due to Social Security.

When Social Security is examined as a single program—as it should be—the figures are far less disturbing. Every year, the system's trustees publish an actuarial report in which they make three sets of assumptions about future rates of population growth, including immigration, and future rates of economic expansion. Using the intermediate set of assumptions, the 1996 report concludes that for the next thirty-three years the Social Security Administration can afford to pay current levels of benefits (indexed for inflation) to all those who qualify for them. After 2029, there will be enough payroll-tax revenue from future workers to finance benefits equal to seventy-seven

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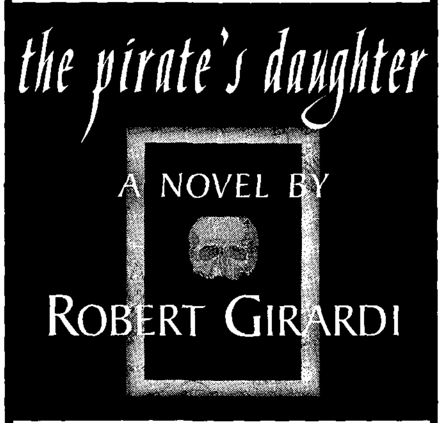

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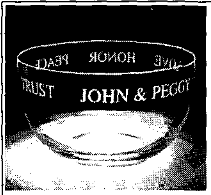

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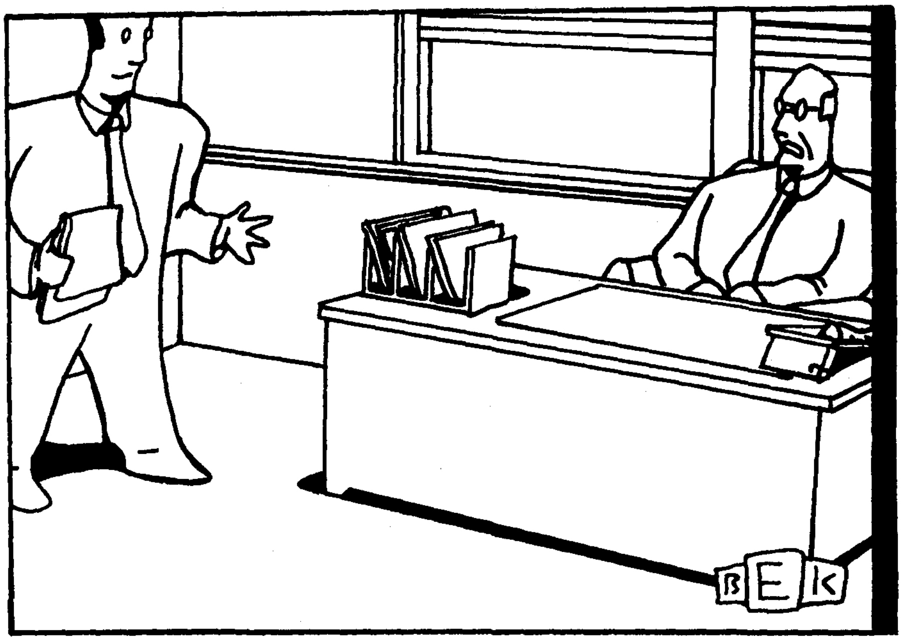
This is hardly a system in terminal crisis. It means that even if no reforms were to be introduced between now and 2029—an eventuality that is highly unlikely—the government would still be able to send out checks worth three-quarters of today's benefits to all retirees for the succeeding half century. If Peterson is right about one of his claims—that "more young people believe in UFOs than think they will ever receive Social Security"—then such skepticism only shows the lack of public understanding of how pensions are financed.

A good way to think of the long-term viability of Social Security is to assume that current policies remain unchanged and calculate the amount that payroll taxes would have to rise in order to pay full retirement benefits to everybody who qualifies. After reading Peterson's analyses, it is easy to conclude that taxes would have to double or even treble, but that is not so.

According to the Social Security trustees, the retirement system's aggregate deficit over the next seventy-five years is likely to equal approximately 2.2 per cent of total payroll earnings over that period. The figure means that if payroll-tax contributions were raised by 2.2 per cent of income immediately—1.1 per cent for the employee portion and 1.1 per cent for the employer portion—the government would be able to pay for the current package of benefits, indexed for inflation, for everybody who reaches retirement age until 2070, without any deficit at all. A payroll-tax increase of 2.2 per cent is a serious matter, but whether it qualifies as a "demographic time bomb," to use Peterson's phrase, is surely debatable.

What is more, the future shortfall of 2.2 per cent does not have to be closed either by raising payroll taxes or by radically altering Social Security benefits, as Peterson implies. This fact is made clear in an official report scheduled for release this week by the Advisory Council on Social Security, a panel of thirteen retirement experts which was appointed by the White House in 1994 to examine the future of the system. Although the members of the Advisory Council divided into three factions, they all accepted the 2.2-per-cent figure as the best estimate of the financial deficit facing Social Security. The largest group on the council, consisting of six members, went out of its way to attack the arguments of alarmists like Peterson. "We are concerned that much public discussion of the future of Social Security is based on misinformation about its financing," these members wrote. "Social Security is not about to expire and does not require heroic measures."

That group was led by Robert M. Ball, a Commissioner of Social Security from 1962 to 1973, who is acknowledged to be perhaps the country's leading expert on the program. Ball and his colleagues advocated closing the seventy-five-year



"Just do the work. No one cares if you get goose bumps."

deficit of 2.2 per cent by raising income taxes on Social Security payments, trimming the growth in retirement benefits, and including 3.7 million state- and local-government employees, who are currently outside the system. They also said that the Social Security Administration should consider investing some of its assets in the stock market. (At the moment, the retirement system holds only government bonds, which tend to yield a lower return than stocks do.) These proposed reforms are remarkably modest. If they should be enacted, they would hardly be noticed by the majority of Social Security recipients.

The two other groups on the Advisory Council agreed that Ball's proposals would close the actuarial deficit facing Social Security, but each called for additional measures to raise national saving. One group—of two members, led by the council's chairman, Edward M. Gramlich, of the University of Michigan—advocated raising the retirement age and introducing compulsory private savings accounts, in which workers would be forced to deposit 1.6 per cent of their earnings. The third group, led by Sylvester J. Schieber, a Washington consultant, and Carolyn Weaver, of the American Enterprise Institute, put forward a more drastic set of reforms. Under their proposal, Social Security checks would be cut in half, and those reduced benefits would be financed mostly from the employers' contribution to the payroll tax. Almost all the employees' contribution would be deposited in private savings accounts, which the workers could invest, and eventually spend, as they saw fit.

In some ways, Peterson's proposals are even more radical than Schieber and Weaver's. Under his plan, all retirees would face an affluence appraisal before they received any government benefits. If their annual income, including Social Security checks and payments from private pension plans, came to more than $40,000, they would lose ten per cent of their Social Security benefits. If their annual income was more than $50,000, they would lose another ten per cent, and so on until people who have an income of $120,000 or more would lose eighty-five per cent of their benefits. In addition to imposing this means test, Peterson would raise the retirement age to seventy by 2015, cut the level of benefits considerably, and introduce mandatory private savings accounts, which workers would have to contribute to in addition to paying their payroll taxes.

The means test is seductive. You don't have to agree with Peterson's claim that Social Security has become a "well-padded hammock for middle- and upper-class retirees" to think that it may be a reasonable idea to reduce the level of benefits going to the rich. However, many experts believe that in practice a means test would prove disastrous. "Of all the changes proposed for Social Security, this is the worst," Robert Ball says. "Means-testing could trigger the disintegration of the whole Social Security plan and make welfare our only national system."

The reasoning behind this argument relates to politics, not economics. At the moment, Social Security is extremely popular, partly because it is universal—everybody has a stake in it—and partly because retirement benefits are related to contributions, so most people think the system is fair. This belief prevails even though poor people get a far better deal than rich people do. One of Social Security's great strengths from an egalitarian perspective is that it redistributes income in a downward direction. High earners receive bigger retirement benefits than do low earners, but the difference is not as large as the gap between the payroll-tax contributions made by the two groups. A means test would curtail wealthy people's benefits even more, and would raise the question of how long they would be willing to support the program. "At a certain point, political support would dissipate," a Clinton Administration adviser says. "By means-testing, you are attacking the support base for Social Security."

A means test could also give rise to another problem, and it is one that relates directly to Peterson's economic arguments: means-testing Social Security benefits would be a disincentive to save. Peterson repeatedly stresses the point that his main goal is to increase the savings rate, but under his plan all those who saved and invested enough to provide a sizable income for their retirement would end up losing some of their Social Security benefits. "Affluence testing is a tax on savings," Peter Diamond, an

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M.I.T. economist who is the president of the National Academy of Social Insurance, says. "The idea that the way to encourage national savings is by imposing a tax on savings seems to me to be a bit perverse."

The proposal to create compulsory private savings accounts is also risky. One of Social Security's great advantages is that it guarantees people a fixed level of retirement benefits and indexes these benefits to inflation. Under a privatized system, only the much reduced basic benefit would be guaranteed by the government, and the bulk of a retiree's income would depend on his or her skills and luck as an investor. Two people who made the same Social Security payments throughout their working lives could end up receiving vastly different retirement benefits. And those who invested unwisely or simply earned low wages could end up with very little.

WHEN I asked Peterson not long ago about charges that he has exaggerated the financial problems facing Social Security, he handed me a large sheaf of papers and computer printouts, and said, "What I've done is have my research people prepare some memos for my own amusement on the whole 2.2-per-cent argument, and the whole Trust Fund notion, which I think is an oxymoron. What this so-called solution leaves us with in this pay-as-you-go system is annual deficits of between $570 billion and $2 trillion by 2040."

Peterson's research people turned out to be Richard Jackson and Neil Howe, two analysts at the Concord Coalition. The memos that they had prepared for Peterson did not dispute the 2.2-per-cent estimate of the actuarial deficit facing Social Security but instead tried to shift the terms of the debate. In a memo dated November 18th, Howe gave Peterson a list of arguments that, he noted, "you can use to refute the 'Social Security trust fund' myth, otherwise known as the myth of the '2.2 per cent solution.' " The memo said, "You should start out by emphasizing that your measure of Social Security's impact on long-term economic performance focuses on its effect on savings rates and thereby its effect on living standards." It also suggested that Peterson "make fun of the whole 'trust fund' concept" on the ground that the Trust Fund "puts nothing 'in trust.' "

Peterson repeated some of these arguments to me. "I think what this country needs is an increase in the savings rate. I am not an economist, but I think I understand the basic principles," he said. "There are two ways we can increase savings. We can eliminate government deficits and increase individual savings. We must do both. Boomer retirement expectations are in fantasyland."

Perhaps. But Peterson tends to talk as if the demographic challenges ahead were new and shocking. They are neither. The Greenspan Commission, a bipartisan group set up by the Reagan Administration, addressed them fourteen years ago and suggested a number of steps to take in order to meet them: making Social Security benefits taxable for wealthy individuals, increasing the retirement age to sixty-seven by 2027, raising the payroll tax, and delaying the annual cost-of-living-adjustment benefits. All these steps were taken. As a result, since 1983 the federal government has been collecting far more in payroll taxes than it pays out in retirement benefits, and the surpluses have been invested in a Trust Fund designed to finance future deficits. The accumulated surplus now totals about $565 billion, and it is growing rapidly. By 2018, it is expected to reach $2.87 trillion. After that date, the Trust Fund will gradually be depleted until it runs out, in 2029. However, if benefits are trimmed and taxes are raised, as seems likely, the Trust Fund will continue to grow long after 2018.

Peterson's argument is that the Trust Fund surpluses are not genuine savings, because they are used to buy Treasury bonds, and the federal government then uses the proceeds of these bond sales to help finance its other spending plans.

"The Trust Fund, essentially, is money that has already been spent," he told me. "The reason it was spent is that there wasn't enough money in the non-Social Security part of the budget, so we used it to fund big deficits."

When I repeated Peterson's argument to M.I.T.'s Diamond, he said, "I think that's totally wrong. If you saw a private pension plan holding Treasury securities, you would think it has a rather safe, and perhaps too conservative, portfolio. You wouldn't think it was in trouble, because it had federal securities." In economic terms, the key question is whether Social Security surpluses have been, and will continue to be, used to finance higher budget deficits, as Peterson claims. For much of the past decade, Social Security has been running sizable surpluses ($71 billion in 1996), but the budget deficit excluding Social Security has been falling sharply. This suggests that the Social Security surpluses have not encouraged the rest of the government to run higher deficits—and, if that is so, then the Trust Fund surpluses represent real savings, regardless of which specific assets they are invested in.

PETERSON resents the charge that his proposals would undermine Social Security and end up hurting those who depend on it for their retirement. "I'm a son of Greek immigrants, my parents started out very poor, and I want to preserve the safety net," he told me. "What I'm worried about is if we don't reform this program, what's very likely to happen is we run into a crisis. Then we would have to cut the benefits suddenly and across the board, which would affect those most dependent on Social Security."

That is a legitimate worry, and Peterson's arguments—especially his warnings about Medicare spending—deserve a broad hearing. However, the problems facing Social Security are more tractable than he makes out, and it would be premature to abandon the essentials of a program that has done more than any other to reduce poverty and inequality in America. Robert Ball, who started working for the Social Security system in 1939, makes the point well. "The situation with Social Security is like that of homeowners living in a sound house that they very much like and that needs only to have its mortgage refinanced," he writes in the Advisory Council report. "There is no need to tear the house down, remodel it or trade it for a different house." ♦

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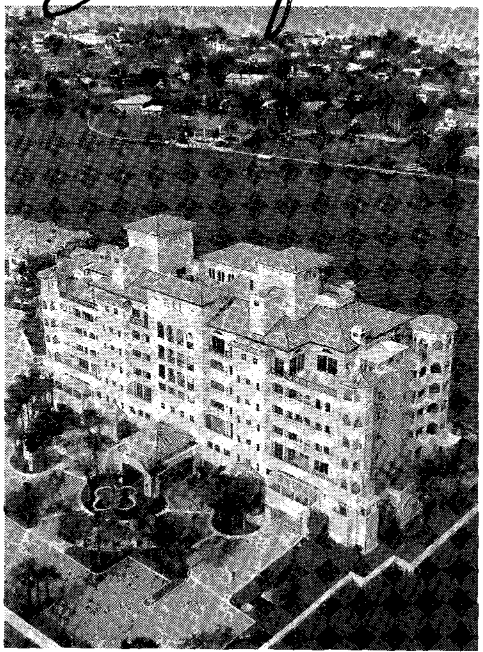

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WAGSTAFF'S EYE

When did photography become a collectible art? When Sam Wagstaff, the patron who discovered Robert Mapplethorpe, made it one.

BY HILTON ALS

IN Francesco Scavullo's 1977 book of portraits, "Scavullo on Men," there is an image of the collector Sam Wagstaff with the artist who would eventually be the most notorious of Wagstaff's many acquisitions—the photographer Robert Mapplethorpe. One senses that Scavullo is looking less intently at the two men than at the almost shameful emotional contrast between them. Mapplethorpe, the rough young man from Queens, gazes directly at the camera with a calm forthrightness, while Wagstaff, the son of a patrician lawyer, wears the burnished look of someone who has waited years to become himself—or, at least, a self that can be loved for all its various components. As the writer Jane Bowles once said, "The rich want to be liked for their money, too." And in New York in 1972 Wagstaff had met the person in whose rapacious and charming company he would become the person he intended to be: an artist whose medium was collecting.

Sam Wagstaff was, according to many people who pursue the beautiful with a determination meant to outweigh the exigencies of life, one of the most beautiful men they had ever seen. Over six feet tall in his stocking feet, thin, and poised, he was thoroughly male and Anglo-Saxon in the way he assumed your interest in him and claimed your attention. He was born in New York on November 4, 1921, and delighted in recounting how his ancestors, who had been New Yorkers since at least 1790, once owned a large portion of what is now Central Park. He had thick, crisp eyebrows, an endearing smile, and long, slender hands, which he would pass, slowly, like a fortune-teller mesmerized by images in a crystal ball, over the thousands of photographs he collected, as if he could absorb each photograph's essence telepathically. Not unlike Andy Warhol, he was an extremely private "public" collector—but he did perhaps as much as anyone else to change the public world of photography. Over a period of about twelve years, beginning around the time he met Mapplethorpe, Wagstaff transformed the landscape of collecting in general and collecting photographs in particular; his interests and his purchases galvanized the American, British, and French markets so forcefully that collecting photographs became as credible and nearly as profitable an industry as collecting "real" art—paintings, drawings, prints—had always been. In his passion for beautiful objects, he outstripped his father, Samuel J. Wagstaff, Sr., who collected ephemera of all kinds; he also had an uncle who had one of the largest collections of sports-related books in the world. He himself amassed one of the largest private photography collections in the world (including at least twenty-five hundred masterworks), and one of the most wide-ranging: early-nineteenth-century French photography, early-twentieth-century British, some late-twentieth-century American, Xeroxes of "found" images, images to be viewed through a stereoscope, and postcards and photographs of a personal obsession—cats. Among the many photographers whose work he collected were Lewis Carroll, Hill and Adamson, Louis-Antoine Froissart, Edgar Degas, Dr. Guillaume Duchenne de Boulogne, Gustave Le Gray, Roger Fenton, Edward Weston, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Mathew Brady and his associates, Judy Linn, and, of course, his close friend Mapplethorpe—some of whom will be represented in "The Eye of Sam Wagstaff," an exhibition of forty prints from his collection, opening this month at the J. Paul Getty Museum, in Malibu, California. According to the Getty's photography curator, Weston Naef, the diversity of Wagstaff's taste has helped to establish the current trend in how

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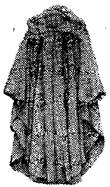

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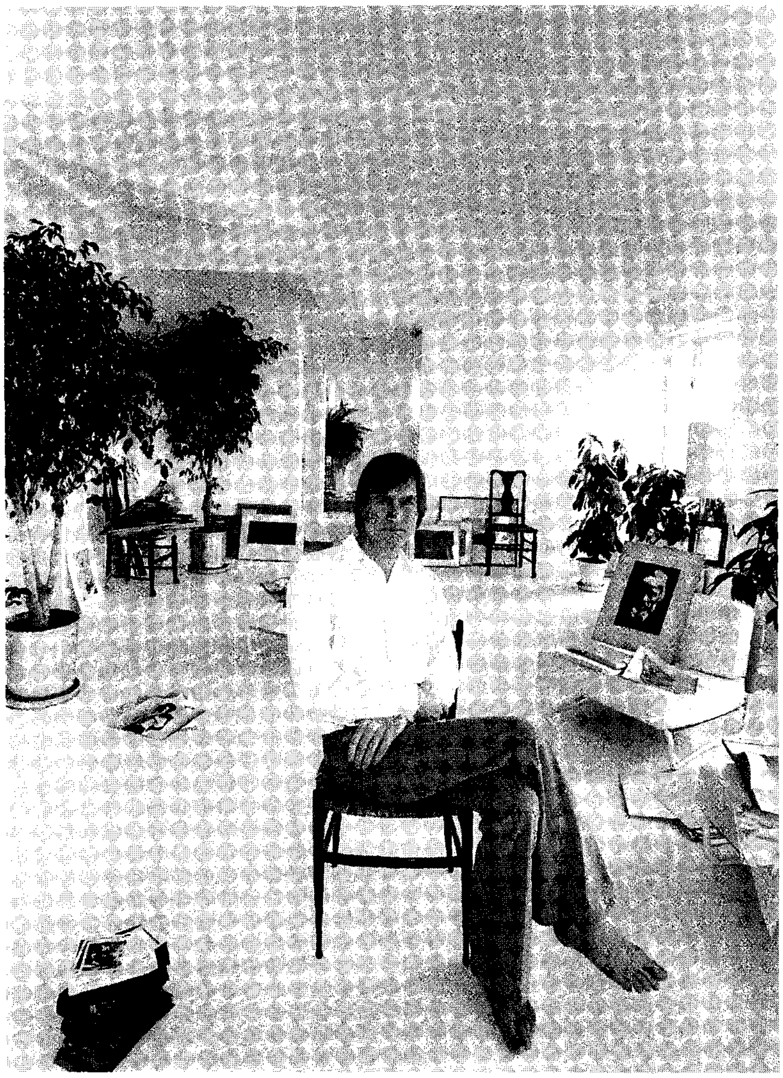
photography is presented in museums and galleries across the country: idiosyncratically, as snapshots belonging to a perverse family of man. Wagstaff's eye, as the show documents, was equally drawn to the voluptuous (Paul Outerbridge's "Eggs in Bowl") and the abstract (Edward Steichen's "Time-Space Continuum"; to the homoerotic (Carroll's "Portrait of a Young Boy") and the grand (Timothy O'Sullivan's "Tufa Domes, Pyramid Lake, Nevada").

As a child, Wagstaff collected postcards and tore photographs out of magazines in an attempt to interpret and understand his world, which itself was defined by appearances. His mother, Olga Piorkowska, had worked as a fashion illustrator for *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue* in the twenties. She was obsessed with her son's appearance, and gave little attention to his younger sister, Judith, who was plain and less adventurous than he was. During Sam's adolescence, his mother taught him to smoke cigarettes, in order to make him appear older than he was, and after she divorced his father and married a wealthy society painter, Donald Newhall, she and her new husband took the ten-year-old Sam on a two-year trip to Europe, leaving his sister behind.

Wagstaff went to St. Bernard's, Hotchkiss, and Yale, where he majored in English. After graduating, in 1944, he joined the Navy and fought at Omaha Beach. "Sam showed me a photograph once from when he was in the Navy," the art historian Anne Ehrenkranz recalls. "It was one of those ship photographs, with hundreds of sailors. You could pick Sam out because he was wearing a white scarf flung over his shoulder. You could pick him out because of his style." The fact that he was homosexual—and closeted—mirrored a duality to which he would devote his life as a curator: the dichotomy between what a thing appears to be and what it is, the essence revealed through interpretation. The photographer Judy Linn remembers the strange sensation of "looking through Sam's big piles of pictures and coming across pictures of a débutante ball, in the forties. And there was Sam, smiling, and dancing with some girl. I couldn't look at the picture—I found it embarrassing."



Wagstaff in his apartment in 1976. A dealer could tell a collector, "Sam liked this photograph," and that anointed it. Photograph by Arnold Newman.

For ten years after the war, Wagstaff worked in the production department of the advertising firm of Benton & Bowles; advertising, he once told a friend, was "the deadliest, most odious profession in the world." Then, with financial support from his mother and stepfather, he enrolled in New York University's Institute of Fine Arts, where, as Weston Naef notes in the Getty-exhibition brochure, the art historian Richard Offner inspired him "to focus on painting, but Wagstaff never forgot the way Offner used original photographs as teaching devices." In 1957, Wagstaff was accepted into the institute's Museum Training Course, which would qualify him for a museum job. He joined the staff of the Wadsworth Atheneum, in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1961 and began to promote one of his early enthusiasms—minimalist art. Jane Smith, the wife of the late sculptor Tony Smith, recalls, "He became interested in Tony's work after Ray Parker delivered a lecture about it. He came out to see us in New Jersey in his little Volkswagen, the weekend after Kennedy was assassinated. He gave Tony his first one-man show." In addition to Smith, Wagstaff championed the minimalist painter Agnes Martin and Warhol's early work.

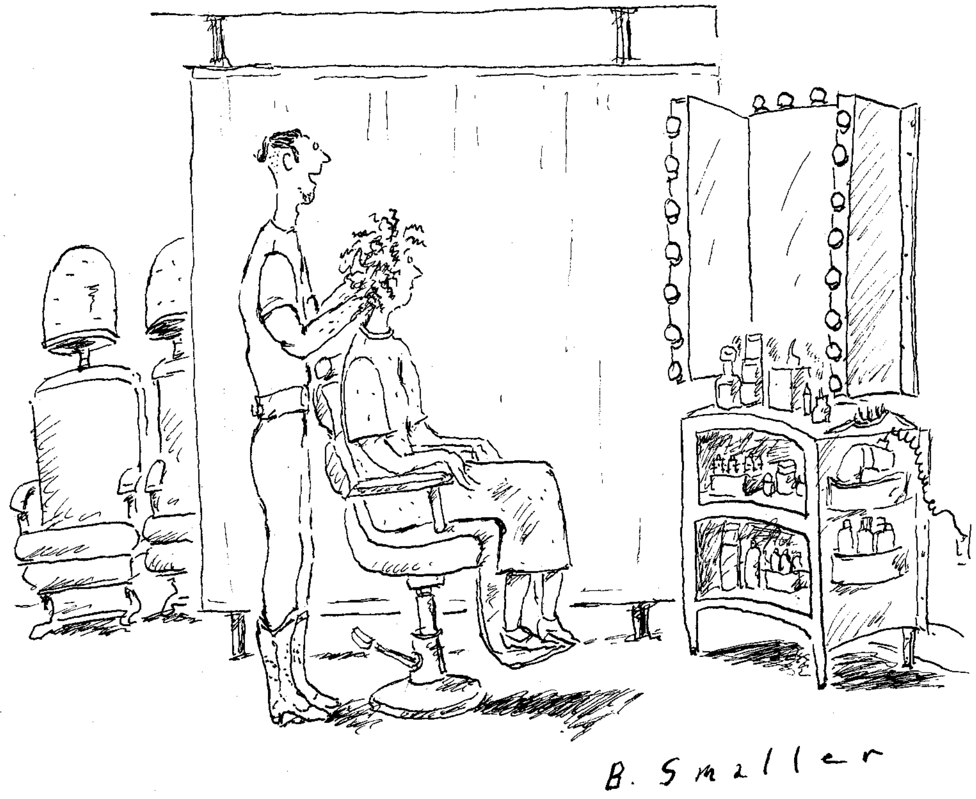
At the Detroit Institute of Arts, to which he moved from the Wadsworth in 1968, Wagstaff's enthusiasms again exceeded his administrative duties. "What Sam did in Detroit was to ask where the local artists were," recalls the artist Ellen Phelan, who was a student then, working in the institute's conservation department. "Sam became involved in the community. He was certainly the most stylish thing to come to Detroit in a long time. But there were grumblings from the trustees that he was too 'out there.' " In 1971, when he arranged for the artist Michael Heizer to create an earthwork on the D.I.A.'s lawn—"Dragged Mass," as Heizer titled it, involved dragging a massive granite block across the lawn by means of four bulldozers, a crane, and a crew of men—Wagstaff was asked to remove the work from the museum premises. He was then quoted in the local press, calling the decision "a triumph for manicured grass over fine art."

Seven months later, Wagstaff resigned from his position and turned resolutely to the art of acquisition—a pursuit that was made somewhat easier by the death of his stepfather, which improved his financial situation. "It was important to Sam that his collecting become something of an achievement," the collector Paul Walter explains, "because everything else had failed."

LIKE many people who possess the financial wherewithal to acquire art but cannot create it, Wagstaff was repeatedly drawn in his artistic taste to the selfish, indecorous animal within himself—the thing that his sense of propriety never allowed him to unleash in the social realm. In a sense, Robert Mapplethorpe represented the apotheosis of such taste. The accounts of how the two men first got together vary somewhat; Sam Green, the former director of the Institute of Contemporary Art, in Philadelphia, recalls introducing them on his porch in Fire Island in 1972. "Robert was very businesslike about procuring Sam as a patron," Green says. "He called me and insisted I arrange another meeting. I think I just passed along phone numbers, and the rest was history." The history that Wagstaff and Mapplethorpe made during their fifteen-year association—first a kind of marriage, both sexual and artistic, and then a friendship, which lasted until Wagstaff's death, from AIDS, in 1987—has taken on monumental proportions, akin to those Henry James describes in his novella "The Lesson of the Master," in which a young man, a student, not only appeals to his older master to teach him the aesthetic values he wants to absorb but tries to grasp the source of the master's particular genius by possessing *him*. In a way, Wagstaff's quest as a collector was as important to Mapplethorpe as it was to Wagstaff, and their life together was prey to the complexities of any relationship in which money plays a major role. From the beginning, Mapplethorpe, who was largely unknown as a photographer at the time they met, depended on Wagstaff to expose him to the collectors and dealers who could make a difference to his career. Wagstaff had a certain authority over people. "Once, Sam took me up to his place on Bond Street, saying that I should come and see the work of a young friend," the collector Harvey Shipley Miller told me. "Then Robert handed me this portfolio of work, and in it were intimate pictures of him and Sam. I remember that Sam didn't look at the pictures in a personal way—his eye was involved in looking at the work. I ended up buying a self-portrait. One felt under enormous pressure to buy something." Wagstaff, meanwhile, received something of equal if not greater importance in exchange for his efforts: the discovery of contemporary photography. "I met a photographer named Robert Mapplethorpe and was quite amazed by his photographs," Wagstaff said once in an interview. "He photographed in series. I've been taking photographs actually since I was a child and I had color pictures in series I had taken on the beach in Cannes a couple of years before, and I was amazed that he was doing series, too. I very much admired what he was doing in photography. Until then I had always hated contemporary photography, it didn't seem very interesting."

In order to indulge his newfound passion, Wagstaff sold off pieces of his painting collection—an Agnes Martin here, a Frank Stella there—saying, as the collector John Waddell recalls, "Well, I have to clip another coupon." Waddell adds, "Sam had that New England Wasp relationship to money. 'Everything I have goes to collecting,' he'd say"—except where Mapplethorpe was concerned. Shortly after meeting Mapplethorpe, Wagstaff bought him a loft on Bond Street, several doors down from his own apartment. The writer and curator Klaus Kertess recalls, "I lived in Sam's building and, of course, I was madly in love with him—who wouldn't be? And I remember how there were all these women in love with Sam. One of them was a former girlfriend of Jackson Pollock. She used to bang on his door and scream to me, 'I know he'd be in love with me if he would only let me in.' He never asked her in."

In many ways, despite the continued association of Wagstaff's name with Mapplethorpe's, the cult of Sam Wag-



"I love your hair—just not on your head."

staff was—and remains—a feminine one. Its members have included beauties ranging from Patti Smith to Mrs. William Rhinelander Stewart. (When asked in an interview what kind of women were attracted to him, Wagstaff joked, "The bad ones. The really bad ones.") Anne Ehrenkranz, who was Wagstaff's research assistant in the early eighties, told me, "When I went to work for Sam, a whole world opened up for me—the world of photography, which was not my field then. And the way in which I was exposed to the work was by looking at all the photographs Sam kept on the floor. There was nothing in his refrigerator. He had nothing in that space except an old sofa, and there Sam would be in his Brooks Brothers shirt—with its collar frayed—and jeans. I had to buy paper towels and scrub surfaces, because it never occurred to him to clean. I don't think he knew how."

When Wagstaff's female friends and acquaintances discuss the significant presence of Robert Mapplethorpe in his life, it's as though they were discussing the Other Woman—the woman with whom they had to compete for the attention of a man they could never really have. Mapplethorpe's female friends were not particularly enamored of Sam, either. Carol Squiers, an editor at *American Photo*, who was a friend and champion of Mapplethorpe's in the late seventies, recalls, "Sam didn't want to share Robert with anyone. He put me down, because he didn't like the fact that I was championing Robert. He said I looked too young for the job. Being on Robert's side—that was Sam's job."

"I didn't like Sam," the painter Helen Marden says. "He was anti-Semitic, anti-black, and he didn't like women. I remember going to dinner with Robert and Patti and Sam and I remember just hiding my head in my hands because of all the things he was saying."

"Sam thought artists were natural aristocrats," Ellen Phelan remembers. "Interesting, considering his politics were somewhere to the right of Genghis Khan." And Mapplethorpe, as a Roman Catholic lower-middle-class boy, was just what Wagstaff felt an artist and partner should be: someone who explored a world, at least aesthetically, that piqued his interest, but who never allowed him in, except as a buyer. Without Wagstaff, however, Mapplethorpe was merely another artist, not a cultural star. Mapplethorpe was cannily aware of position, and he learned quickly that he needed someone with Wagstaff's credentials and breeding to lend his work the aura of fine art.

"Robert was one of those people who would call curators and say, 'I have new work,'" Sam Green recalls. "I looked at his grotesquely inept work and said, 'What you need is a patron.' Robert just wanted more and more." And Mapplethorpe was good at getting what he needed, as evidenced by Judy Linn's account of how Mapplethorpe's famous 1973 self-portrait came about—a photograph that she in fact took. "One day, Robert asked me to come over," Linn told me. "He had set up the lights and everything—he wanted me to take a picture of his arm, between his elbow and his wrist. And I took the picture—not just of his arm but of his face as well, because he looked so happy. When Robert developed the negatives and saw what he had, he called me up and said, 'Judy, these pictures are *mine*.' This was a strange moment for me, because I suddenly realized the problem of claiming authorship of a photograph—whose vision is it, anyway, in the age of mechanical reproduction? It's an aspect that connoisseurs, museum curators, and critics generally don't address, given the stakes."

Michael Stout, a lawyer who had represented Salvador Dali and became friendly with Mapplethorpe in the early eighties (it was he who effectively put into place the enormous Mapplethorpe calendar, poster, and book industry), recalls that he "had to stop Robert from putting cocks on coffee mugs." Stout explains, "He was desperate to be a monogram queen—you know, the kind of person who wears monogrammed velvet slippers—which is what Sam was."

IN the Mapplethorpe archives, there is a cache of letters from Wagstaff to Mapplethorpe that reveal the at once strange and banal emotional tenor of their association. Wagstaff's letters, warm and somewhat childlike, don't break out of the context of Wasp terms of affection: he calls Mapplethorpe, alternately, Muffin, Sweet Mufflet, Mufflicious, Lumplet, Wumps, Lumps, and Gooper. It's as if Wagstaff were using these endearments to instruct Mapplethorpe in love as Sam knew it growing up—a matter of form first, and intention second. This was in direct contrast to love as Mapplethorpe preferred to experience it: in a predominantly black male world, which he could look down on or stare at, a world where the inhabitants were "niggers," who let themselves be recorded in Mapplethorpe's pristine and distanced photographic theatre of cruelty.

A postcard from Sam to Robert, Paris, 1977: "Dearest Wumps: Just a little hug note to tell it how smart it is!"

Sam to Robert, 1979: "Hello sweet baby Wumps—I miss it! it ain't all that much fun without my Gooper around."

Sam to Robert, 1979, a postcard sent from Italy, bearing an image of a cat with a coffee grinder: "Dearest Lumps: Is this a pepper grinding pussy or a coffee grinding pussy. I hardly know which. Whatever it is, it's very very interested. Had sort of a fun dinner with an old American woman friend of my stepfather's, a Countess Gozzi with a private motor launch which came to pick me up. Well it was OK but she repeated each story worse than me. That kind of old-time snobbism is fun. . . ."

Mapplethorpe, apparently, didn't reply in a similar vein; as one photographer told me, "Robert wasn't much of a reader or a writer." But in the photographs that Wagstaff chose during his association with Mapplethorpe—a bunch of bananas that resembles a crown, by Edward Weston, Le Gray's studies of trees and faces, with their black and gray tones—one can see how Mapplethorpe the photographer began to emerge: his work was in part the result of an intense art-historical education through Wagstaff's acquisitions. Although Mapplethorpe enjoyed the visual privilege of daily access to the prints, he wasn't particularly interested in discussing what the photographs meant to Wagstaff. Amy Sullivan, who became close to Mapplethorpe in the mid-seventies, recalls, "Robert wasn't very analytical. You could gossip with him, but to analyze was difficult for him." And Helen Marden, who lived on Bond

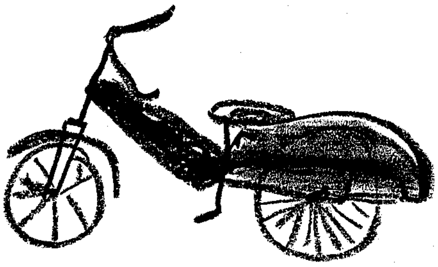
Street near Wagstaff and Mapplethorpe, concurs: "Robert and I spent time lying on his bed laughing, sometimes at how much all those photographs Sam bought were worth."

But, despite the camp sarcasm that Mapplethorpe levelled at Wagstaff's seriousness, he wanted to possess it. If his photographs can be said to report on anything at all, they report on his gaining access to all that was denied him in his earlier life: the hierarchy of the sexual underground, the grand homes that Wagstaff "belonged" to. Wagstaff's imaginative process—his ability to hold opposing opinions at the same time—was more subtle. In a Clarence White landscape, in a portrait by Julia Margaret Cameron, in the great nineteenth-century Hill and Adamson works, Wagstaff saw the possibility of a narrative: the loss, to some degree, of emotional control within the internal life of an artist—the one thing that Wagstaff was not and Mapplethorpe (his infantilized Wumps) was. Mapplethorpe was a narcissist, who used photography in order to see himself—a process that Wagstaff was literally too collected to indulge in. His biography is in his acquisitions, under which he buried his self.

UNLIKE collectors of the other plastic arts—painting, say, or sculpture—the photography collector is akin to the photographer: both practice a process of selection in order to obtain (whether purchased or produced) the final image. In an interview in the mid-eighties in *Popular Photography*, Wagstaff said what he had come to look for in a photograph: "First, something I *don't* look for. I don't look for photographs as an investment. As a collector, I try to exclude myself from the 'sure bets.' As in music where Brahms, Beethoven, and Mozart are all 'givens,' so it is true in photography. We can see those givens again and again in most major collections or history books. They don't need me, and I don't feel I need them, so I'm free to play around on the periphery if, indeed, it *is* the periphery." Weston Naef, who spent a great deal of time looking at photographs with Wagstaff, believes that "a collector is someone who can't sleep, which Sam couldn't do until he had the next purchase. The collector has a personality. Sam used to say, 'When you have a dime, you buy what costs a dime. Any photograph that anyone thought of making is worth collecting, or at least looking at.' "

The photography world that Wagstaff entered in the early seventies was small enough for his presence not to be eclipsed by administrative boards and museum politics. "There were maybe a hundred people in the photography world that you would see over and over again," the collector John Waddell says. "This was completely virgin territory, and Sam was a star, because he had so much art-historical reference that he could apply to looking." The photography curator at the Museum of Modern Art, Peter Galassi, agrees: "He had been in the big art world and in Europe. And he knew that what he was doing was important. It didn't matter what the artistic status of the person who made the photograph was—it was the work itself." Wagstaff once said, "If you look into a photograph, the intention of the photographer to do something is as possible as the intention of the painter to do something. People are scared by the idea that a photograph goes through this mechanical thing called a camera, but the camera never took a photograph itself." Galassi explains, "You can only discover a great idea like that once. His recognition of vernacular photography from a mature, sophisticated high-art point of view—that recognition became a central point of view in photography. What Sam did was to voraciously and imaginatively apply this to the market in terms of collecting. There had been brilliant collectors before Sam, like André Jammes, but there wasn't a market. There were no big auctions. Photography was an adventure—Sam didn't know how it would turn out."

"He had very little use for received opinions," says John Szarkowski, the director emeritus of MOMA's photography department, who knew Wagstaff most closely when the latter was a member of the museum's photography committee. Szarkowski adds, "Sam was part of the last generation of museum people who were broadly cultivated not because of what they learned in school but because of their background and curiosity. He had the intellectual restlessness of that generation, which could seem dilettantish."

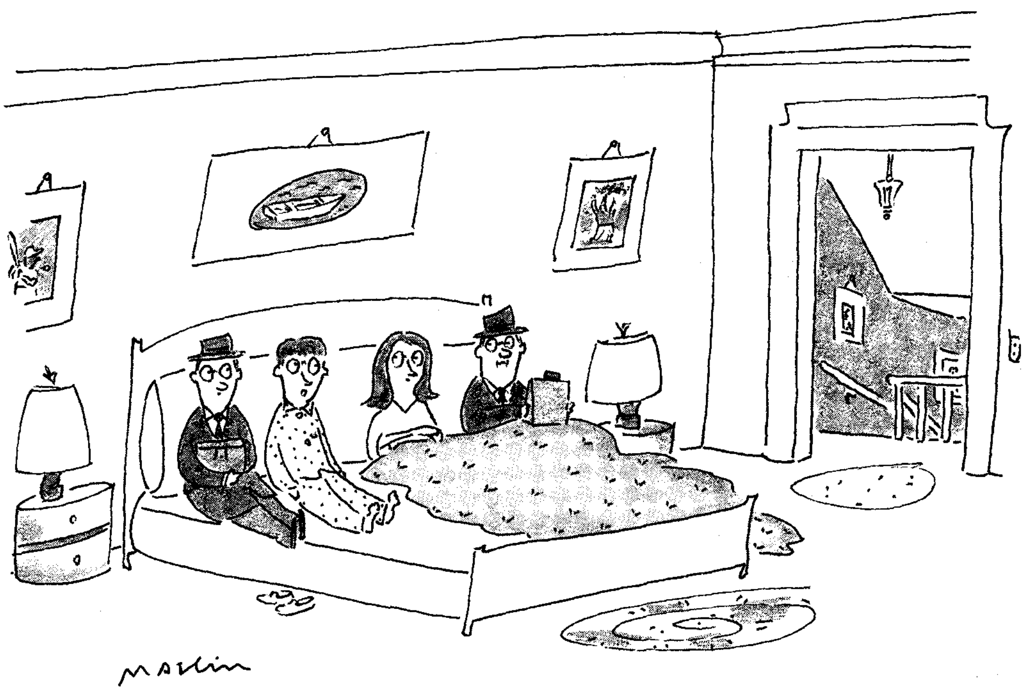


And Wagstaff could be ruthless, although in the most polite, distanced way imaginable. "Once, he did something that was awful, but I forgave him," Waddell says. "At one auction, there was one little picture that I wanted, and I was sitting there next to Sam, who was buying loads of things. Anyway, the picture I wanted came up for auction, and Sam knew I wanted it. I kept raising my hand, and Sam didn't raise his. I thought I was safe, but someone—I didn't know who—kept bidding on the picture, upping the price to three times the estimate. Later, I found out it was Sam, though he hadn't raised his hand. Every time I bid, he'd wink at the auctioneer."

Only a handful of photography collectors—people like Wagstaff, Waddell, and Paul Walter—would go to the auctions every year, looking for something to excite their curiosity. "The auctions served a different purpose then from what they do now," the dealer Daniel Wolf explains. "They weren't just about sales—they were about learning." The London collections, according to the dealer Howard Read, didn't start until 1974, and didn't really get going until 1978, when they began to be held three or four times a year. "That's where Sam got his Julia Margaret Camerons," Read recalls. In Paris, Wagstaff made the acquaintance of a number of French dealers who would influence his taste, including André Jammes, who increased his reach. The language of nineteenth-century French photography was very broad, and Wagstaff opened it up even further, to include the strange, the common, the erotic. "Sam brought Le Gray to the world, and Carleton Watkins as well," Wolf says. "He hated mundane photographers like Imogen Cunningham. And as a dealer you could say to another photography collector, 'Sam liked this photograph,' and that anointed it."

Eugenia Parry, who collaborated with Jammes on the book "The Art of French Calotype," recalls meeting

Wagstaff in the mid-seventies in Paris, where she had a Guggenheim grant to work on French photography. "We were not experts in this stuff—we were just the 'eye' club," she says. "It was a party. I had some crazy times with Sam, because he liked to rage. He had the rages of a repressed person. He gave me the idea that Le Gray was a 'horizontal' artist, and that his work was the culmination of elaborate printing. He was right, of course. Sam had these weird little intuitive hunches. I had these passionate visual associations with him. Later, we'd sit around his apartment in New York and smoke dope. And I recall this: he liked subjects in photographs who were boys who had been wounded—he would 'treat' me to four hours of Civil War amputees, and so forth. I never knew why. But they were soul pictures, not sadomasochistic. Sometimes, even if the picture is of a person who is cut up, it's not a picture of a person but a picture of a soul. You could become disoriented because of his intensity."



"Well, it strikes me as just a little unfair that you and your attorney have all the covers, while my attorney and I have none."

• •

WAGSTAFF'S interest in the democratization of photography extended, of course, to Mapplethorpe's semipornographic portraits, whose darkness does not belie the coziness, or the longed-for intimacy, of men performing sexual acts that are no less intimate because they are theatrical. "His intelligence could take in dark things," Parry says of Wagstaff. "He was interested in the dark side of life, and photography released that." It's unclear whether or not Wagstaff participated in Mapplethorpe's increasing explorations of the dark side of sexuality during the mid-seventies—the time of their closest physical and emotional connection. But it is clear that Wagstaff was a cynosure for Mapplethorpe, who didn't really possess the ability to change. John Waddell says, "It was as if Sam had to change his identity every few years. I remember him saying that there were many things I would never know about him."

After several years, Wagstaff's interest in Mapplethorpe seems to have shifted from the work itself to the fascination with powerlessness that it often revealed. Although Wagstaff had been Mapplethorpe's mentor and benefactor when the two first met, both men were probably aware that Mapplethorpe's fame would eventually supersede Wagstaff's, just as Mapplethorpe's sexual authority and experience were greater than Wagstaff's. In the end, Wagstaff was a kind of Svengali, creating a Trilby who would not only introduce him to the larger world but, in a sense, consume him. As their relationship progressed, Wagstaff began to take a great deal of cocaine and to sleep with a number of young men, in the Mapplethorpe mode. "Robert procured young men and drugs for Sam," John Waddell says. And, like many people interested in a perfect vision of things, Wagstaff, Paul Walter recalls, was prone to "health food and gurus and psychics and crackpots." In the late seventies, Wagstaff and Mapplethorpe's love affair (though not their friendship) began to dissolve, as a result, perhaps, of Mapplethorpe's burgeoning confidence as a popular iconoclast, and of his increasing sexual interest in black men. Mapplethorpe found Jim Nelson—Wagstaff's next lover—in San Francisco. "He was sent to Sam in an overnight U.P.S. box by Robert," Sam Green says. "Jim was a hair stylist who would cry over Judy Garland records. He didn't threaten Robert. And he took care of Sam."

The dissolution of Mapplethorpe and Wagstaff's romance was also fuelled by Wagstaff's meeting, in London, in 1976, the French photographer Gerald Incandela, whom Wagstaff persuaded to move to New York. He subsidized Incandela's stay by purchasing many of his black-and-white multiple-image photographs. Again, Wagstaff may have believed that his patronage entitled him to a degree of intimacy, but in this case it was not forthcoming. "I never had a physical relationship with Sam," Incandela says. "And I didn't want to show in the same gallery Mapplethorpe showed at." Wagstaff withdrew his patronage as quickly as he had proffered it. Nevertheless, Incandela considers Wagstaff one of the pivotal people in his life. "Sam could communicate how to like something instinctively," he says. "He was naughty as well. He was like a big child—slightly mischievous."

In Incandela's case, Wagstaff's bad behavior kept Mapplethorpe in thrall to him. Paul Walter recalls having dinner with Mapplethorpe at Max's Kansas City around the time that Wagstaff's infatuation with Incandela was at its most intense: "Robert was carrying on, saying, 'Oh, what am I going to do? I have to find myself another rich boyfriend.' " Like most narcissists, Mapplethorpe seemed to feel that love consisted largely of his partner's adoration of him. In fact, Wagstaff never let Mapplethorpe down. This was clear when Incandela and Wagstaff fell out. Incandela had spent many hours helping Wagstaff edit "A Book of Photographs" (1978), and throughout the process Wagstaff kept pitting Incandela against Mapplethorpe in a battle over whose work would grace the cover. In the end, the cover was a photograph of tulips by Robert Mapplethorpe.

QUAYS

Waiting for the sun to rise in Syracuse, New York,
the snow to melt and a term of grief to pass,
I think of boys who sailed with me
from deserted quays at Rosroe and Cleggan,
Inishturk and Renvyle, Boffin and Shark,
long grown distant from tidal heaves
that broke over our bows
at the Leahy Rocks, Cuddoo and Carrigmahog,
having wives and children to look after,
with cars and television,
no more hand-hauling anchor chains, as when
for sheer love and small money
we toiled with rods and hand lines
far out kedging for pollock on shoals by day,
then cabined in the dark, our warps made fast
to bollards on a slippery fishgut-tainted quay,
where the sea gave an odd suckling sigh
as it ebbed from the dock
and our hull, bruised against a wall of barnacles,
used to groan as we came to rest.

—RICHARD MURPHY

BY 1980, Wagstaff, "an aesthete for our times," as Pierre Apraxine, the curator of photography for the Gilman Paper Company, called him, had had such a wide influence on the photography world that he was asked to appear on the Dick Cavett show. In introducing him, Cavett announced, "Tastemakers have always treated photography as a bastard of the arts. The times have been a-changin'. Many people want photography to take its rightful place in the museums and homes and hearts of America. I think that is what Wagstaff would have it do. Welcome an interesting man, Sam Wagstaff." But Wagstaff was already moving on. He had left Bond Street for a penthouse at 1 Fifth Avenue—it consisted of little more than white floors and white walls, a white sofa, a white wooden chair, and two canvas chairs—and he had another apartment, in the same building, in which he stored his photography collection, in no particular order. "His apartment felt like the most luxurious place on the earth, even though there was nothing in it," Apraxine recalls. "Sam became an interesting man as he grew older. He cut down everything that was not important. Very few people can do this—if you cut down, what's left?"

What continued to be left for Wagstaff was his desire to possess the wildness of spirit that he saw the artist as having and which could not be bought or acquired. Even though he attempted to produce work of his own over the years, his true sensibility was, as he himself said of all collectors, confined to "the chase." He had amassed more than thirty thousand images, and in 1984, at the urging of Daniel Wolf, he decided to sell his collection. "When John Walsh got the job as director of the Getty," Wolf explains, "I called him and told him that a number of collectors would probably be willing to sell their collections. Sam's was by far the most diverse I sold." The Getty Museum reportedly paid about five million dollars for Wagstaff's collection, and, Wolf says, "his collection going to the Getty, and being a cornerstone of its collection, was a point of pride." As for the Getty, Weston Naef noted that, with this acquisition, "for the first time, in one place, the three major trends in early photography—French, British, and pioneering American—are present in equal strength."

Wagstaff's spirit, however, did not change. Shortly before selling his photography collection, he embarked on a new collecting passion—silver. Mapplethorpe (who, as Wagstaff's first wife, had never relinquished the privilege of complaining) supposedly hated and resented this. "Why does Sammy spend all his money on that stuff?" he asked a friend. Actually, as Ingrid Sischy, the editor of *Interview*, has noted, it made a kind of sense, since silver is "photography's elemental relative." But Wagstaff's collecting silver makes even more sense when it's viewed as a return to his ancestral crib—a descent into a world that many of his friends didn't understand. Maybe this is why, in his will, Wagstaff, who curated one silver show before he died, left some family silver to his sister, Judith, whom he never really knew: "I give and bequeath my Tiffany Silver Tea Service marked 'AC,' the Loving Cup which the Spee Club at Harvard gave to my father, the Pitcher . . . won by my great uncle Cornelius Dubois Wagstaff and marked with his name, the Chinese Silver Box marked with my grandmother's initials 'MP,' " and so on—a legacy of dead and dying mores, informed by intractable "taste." Even while he was seriously ill—he was tended by Jim Nelson, and by his women friends—Wagstaff retained his tone of refinement, once saying, when he was asked if he needed anything, "I have a craving for quince."

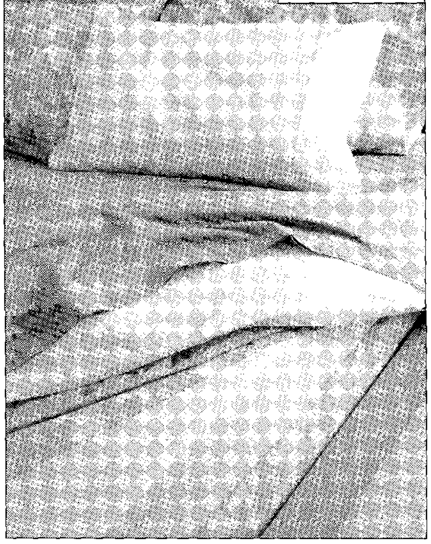
"I never liked Sam especially—his patrician air, the whole my-family-owned-Central Park monologue," Michael Stout recalls. "But he left a great deal of what he had to Robert." Wagstaff's sister contested the will, which left the bulk of the estate, estimated at five million dollars, to Mapplethorpe. Depositions were given about Wagstaff's sexual practices and about various habits of a "quite personal nature," in Stout's words. "But she was very gracious about dropping the case, in the end. In fact, my sense was that she wasn't so much interested in winning the case as finding out who her brother had been." Judith was not the only one to mourn the passing on of Wagstaff's estate. "I felt terrible after Sam died, because there was nothing of him left, acknowledged," Ellen Phelan says. "All the best things auctioned off from the so-called Robert Mapplethorpe collection were Sam's. Robert was a quintessential hustler. Sam was much more compelling. Sam taught me a kind of style, a way of being."

WESTON NAEF, who showed me Wagstaff's collection at the Getty, began working at the museum shortly after the acquisition was made. But he vividly recalls the days when Wagstaff was a presence in New York: "I was an associate curator at the Met, and sometimes he would invite me down to his famous apartment to see things that he'd bought. It was mostly a photo friendship, but it was through the photography that one got the sense of who Wagstaff was: that he felt that looking at pictures and their various juxtapositions was the point, that collecting was an art form for him. He was the strongest cheerleader for photography of his generation."

As I looked at various items from the collection, it seemed to me that Wagstaff's imprimatur was on each of the images—the ghostly touch of a man who, in certain respects, existed through the sensibilities of others. Naef pulled out a particularly dramatic Pierre-Louis Pierson portrait of Napoleon III's son on a pony in front of a curtain, and one could imagine many busy hands behind it, creating the illusion we saw before us—the drama of privilege recorded for posterity. "That's Sam," Naef said. "There." ♦

An allergy sufferer's worst nightmare.

Dust mite with droppings.



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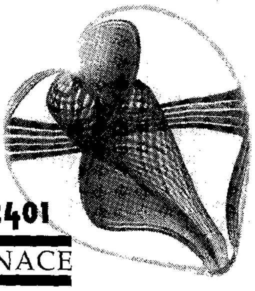

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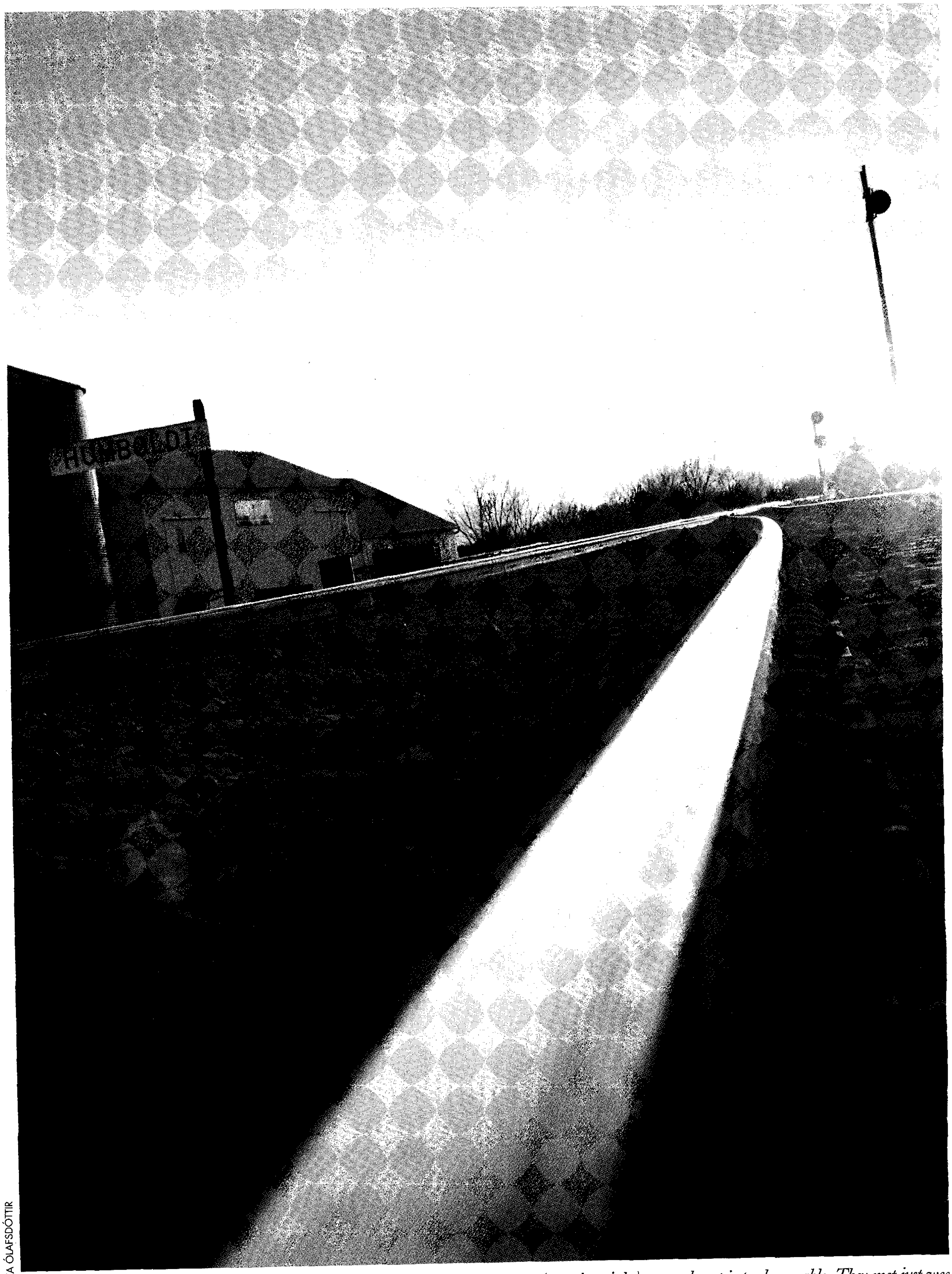
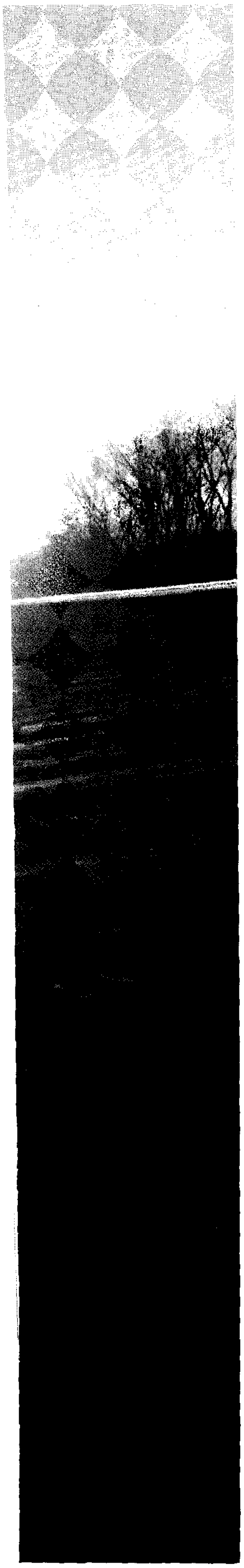
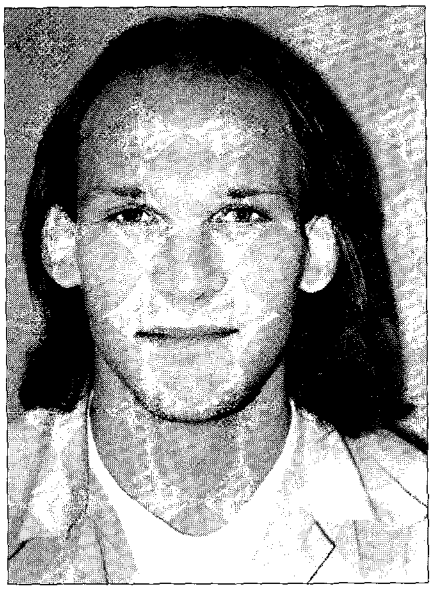


GRÉTA ÓLAFSDÓTTIR

The sociopathic curricula vitae of Thomas Nissen (opposite, left) and John Lotter (opposite, right) were almost interchangeable. They met just wee



efore they committed murder.



A REPORTER AT LARGE

THE HUMBOLDT MURDERS

Five people found themselves one New Year's Eve in a run-down Nebraska farmhouse. How they got there—and why three of them died—is a story of the forgotten young drifters of the heartland.

BY JOHN GREGORY DUNNE

I.

MARVIN T. NISSEN, a.k.a. Thomas M. Nissen, was convicted, in March, 1995, of one count of murder in the first degree and two counts of murder in the second degree in the Richardson County District Court, in Falls City, Nebraska. After making a bargain under which he agreed to testify against his codefendant, John L. Lotter, Thomas Nissen was sentenced to spend the rest of his life in prison, without possibility of parole. He was twenty-two years old when he was convicted, and is currently incarcerated at the Lincoln Correctional Center, in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Nissen is a slight man with a receding chin and reddish-blond hair, a few strands of which, during his weeklong trial, he had twirled into a shoulder-length rat's tail. "A bugger grip" was the way one of the marshals assigned to the courtroom, and wise to the ways of prison life, described this effect. I attended Nissen's trial, and also, later that spring, that of John Lotter. In February, 1996, Lotter was sentenced to death, largely because of the testimony of Thomas Nissen, who presented himself as a reluctant accomplice to Lotter's killer-in-chief; Lotter is now on death row at the Nebraska State Penitentiary.

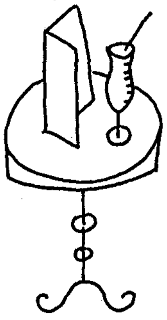
In the summer of 1995, I began to correspond with Thomas Nissen, in the hope that I might interview him about the murders. He has an I.Q. in the low eighties, but his letters, for all the spelling mistakes and grammatical errors, were often acute about how he had got himself in a situation that could only be described as hopeless. With each of my letters, I would include one of my books or a book by my wife, Joan Didion, and Nissen's response indicated that he had read them closely and perceptively. Sometimes he would send drawings that had almost a draftsman's precision, renderings that alluded to his bleak future behind bars. One was headed "Thou Shalt Not Kill," and pictured Nissen's gravestone, as well as an electric chair. Then, in the spring of 1996, Nissen abruptly ended the correspondence:

> Dear Mr. Dunne,
> Good day Sir. Do to personal and financial problems, I will no longer do any type

of interviews. That may change at a later date.
Until then,
/s/ Thomas Nissen
P.S. Please tell your wife hi for me.

2.

"PROMOTE BEEF—RUN OVER A CHICKEN" was a bumper sticker I saw on Highway 50 as I drove down to Falls City from Lincoln on an unseasonably warm day in the late winter of 1994. It was my first trip to Nebraska, a journey for which I had prepared by re-reading Willa Cather's "My Ántonia" and "Obscure Destinies." This was corn and sorghum country; every few minutes, the Top 40 on the car radio was interrupted by the latest crop reports and commodities prices. Family farms dotted the rolling hills, and small herds of cattle grazed on the distant prairie. Outside Humboldt, twenty-six miles northwest of Falls City, I stopped and walked through a tiny, rocky cemetery, where a Czech surname was chiselled on every stone. The dead, I subsequently learned from the pastor of the Catholic church in Falls City, himself a Czech, were the descendants of Middle European refugees who had emigrated to America in the late nineteenth century to escape the dogs of war. Nebraska reminded them of home. They were the spiritual kin of Cather's Bohemians, who had settled in Webster County, to the west, for much the same reason.



The waterfall on the Nemaha River from which Falls City takes its name no longer exists: in the eighteen-fifties, the river channel was straightened, and the town moved to higher ground. "Welcome to Falls City," say the road signs leading into town. "A Great Place to Live," population 4,769. The center of town is dominated by the Richardson County Courthouse; the streets around the square are cobblestone, and on the lawn outside the courthouse is a miniature Statue of Liberty. The sheriff's department is on the third floor, and pinned to its bulletin board was a broadsheet that said, "See Dick Drunk, See Dick Drive, See Dick Die—Don't Be a Dick."

In all, I visited Richardson County four times over the next two years. The separate trials of Thomas Nissen and John Lotter were open-and-shut affairs, each lasting less than two weeks, including jury deliberations. The only suspense was whether Nissen, who was being squeezed by the prosecution, would roll over on Lotter in exchange for not being sentenced to death; for Nissen, this was a no-brainer. Because of concern that it would be difficult to find an impartial jury in a county with a population of less than ten thousand, the jurors and their alternates were selected in Omaha and put up across the street from the courthouse, at the Stephenson Hotel, where rooms went for twenty-two dollars a night. Except during final deliberations, the jury was not sequestered, although Robert Finn, the judge in both trials, suggested that for Omaha people having the freedom of Falls City might be considered a form of sequestration.

In spite of the intense media attention the murders originally generated, I was struck by the absence of a curious local citizenry in the courtroom. When I asked Robert Roh, the pastor of SS. Peter and Paul Catholic Church (Catholics are the largest denomination in Falls City), about this apparent lack of community interest, he answered that *only a minuscule percentage of his congregation*—no more than five per cent, he suggested—knew anyone involved in the case. What seemed implicit in his remark was that the accused and the dead were an embarrassment to Falls City's upbeat, middle-class image of itself. In a promotional brochure, the Falls City Economic Development Board says, "The crime rate is low and the standard of living high." In this part of Nebraska, the high schools are so small that football is an eight-man sport—five linemen and three backs. Outside SS. Peter and Paul, there is a bell tower erected in honor of Steven J. Kopetzky, a football player at Sacred Heart, the Catholic high school. On the tower are inscribed the words "O.K., Coach, I'm ready to go." During a game in 1974, Kopetzky suffered a concussion, was examined by doctors, and then uttered the words now memorialized on the bell tower. Sent back into the game, he collapsed on the next play, and died. In more sophisticated municipalities, the parents would have sued the school and the church; in Falls City, Steven Kopetzky's parents gave money for the bell tower, so that his name and devotion to his team and his school would be remembered.

3.

RICHARDSON COUNTY is in the southeastern corner of Nebraska, abutting Kansas and Missouri, and is washed by the Missouri River. It is the heart of the heartland, the America mythologized, in 1943, by Oscar Hammerstein in the lyrics of "Oklahoma!": "We know we belong to the land, and the land we belong to is grand." In fact, the sentimental celebration of neighborly values that so contributed to the success of "Oklahoma!" exactly coincided with the peripheralization of agrarian life; the military and industrial dislocations caused by the Second World War essentially finished the rural America of the small family farm, ranch, and homestead passed from generation to generation.

This part of prairie America may have been grand, but its history was also soaked with blood. During the Civil War, the raiders William Clarke Quantrill and Bloody Bill Anderson, with their legions of poor whites sympathetic to the Confederacy, pillaged the border states of Kansas and Missouri for private gain and personal satisfaction. The James brothers rode with Quantrill and Anderson, and continued, after the war, to plunder and murder, heroes to the disaffected; Henry Fonda played Frank James in the movie. Economic discontent during the Depression turned the killers Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow into public darlings and folk legends, because they had the effrontery to rob the very banks posting the foreclosure notices on property that had been farmed into extinction; Faye Dunaway and Warren Beatty played Bonnie and Clyde. Nebraska's contribution to this pantheon was Charles Starkweather, a runty garbageman who, in 1958, with his fourteen-year-old girlfriend, Caril Fugate, roamed from one end of the state to the other, killing nine people in less than a week; Martin Sheen and Sissy Spacek played the Starkweather and Fugate surrogates in Terrence Malick's "Badlands."

Rulo, Nebraska, ten miles from Falls City, sits on the western bank of the Missouri River. It is a hard, rough hamlet of fewer than two hundred people, several bars, and a keno parlor. In the mid-nineteen-eighties, a militant doomsday cult led by a man called Michael Ryan established an encampment outside Rulo; Ryan saw the spot as a perfect fire base from which to defend Anglo-Saxon values against Soviet attack and the resultant breakdown of law and order. He claimed that the parts of the Bible with which he disagreed had been added by the Jews, and that Yahweh, as the cult called God, permitted polygamy, which had enabled him to marry not only a second wife but that wife's two sisters, one of whom was fifteen, as well as their mother. To prepare for the imminent Armageddon, Ryan and his followers stockpiled food, fuel, and seventy-five thousand rounds of ammunition. The lust for Armageddon was standard cult stuff, but Ryan added an individual spin. He designated wayward members of the cult slaves, and proclaimed that Yahweh sanctioned bestiality, sodomy, torture, and even murder if a slave was unrepentant or beyond saving.

An appellate decision handed down by the Nebraska Supreme Court affirming the first-degree murder conviction of Michael Ryan would not seem the likeliest place to find a lurid account of the events that took place in Rulo in the spring of 1985, but the very aridity of the decision's language invokes the gothic barbarism of the incidents. There were two victims—Luke Stice, the five-year-old son of Richard (Rick) Stice, a Ryan enlistee, and James Thimm, an adult member of the group who had been demoted to slave. Luke Stice's transgression was that he had apparently "expressed doubts about Yahweh." As punishment for these "bad thoughts," Ryan "forced Rick Stice to perform oral sex on his son Luke and forced Luke to perform oral sex on his father while the other men watched." Luke Stice died after Ryan "repeatedly shoved him, causing Luke's head to strike a cabinet." After Luke's death, "defendant [Ryan] forced Rick Stice to copulate with a goat on three different occasions."

James Thimm also had questioned the existence of Yahweh, and for this heresy Ryan insisted that he, too, be "forced to copulate with a goat." Next, Ryan "told Thimm that he was going to be sexually assaulted with a shovel handle." After some initial probing, the shovel handle was replaced by a thicker pick handle. Thimm was tied to a farrowing crate with baling wire, and his mouth was taped so his screams could not be heard. The next day, Ryan "told Thimm that he was going to skin a part of him. Defendant put on a pair of yellow kitchen gloves and used a razor blade to make incisions in Thimm's leg, and then used pliers to pull off strips of Thimm's skin." Finally, James Thimm died. When his body was disinterred, autopsies were performed by two pathologists, one representing Ryan and one the Richardson County attorney; the only disagreement between the two pathologists "was whether the victim's penis and scrotum had been cut away or had decomposed."

In 1986, Ryan was tried, convicted, and sentenced to death in Nebraska's electric chair. As of June, 1996, Ryan's trials and the subsequent appeals of his death sentence have cost Richardson County more than four hundred and seventy thousand dollars; with the appeals continuing, it is unlikely that the hemorrhage of county resources will end in the foreseeable future. The expense of the Ryan case, along with massive flood damage from the 1993 rains that sent the Missouri over its banks, have essentially tapped Richardson County out.

What the county government did not need was another death-penalty trial that would further drain its exchequer. What it got during the early-morning hours of the last day of 1993 was a triple murder at a remote farmhouse a mile south of Humboldt, murders as singular in their way as the atrocities in Rulo, murders that would result in two more death-penalty trials that would have to be funded by Richardson County.

4.

ANNA MAE LAMBERT lives in Pawnee City, thirty-six miles west of Falls City. She is a small, grandmotherly woman with short, graying hair. For nearly twenty years, she has been a social worker at the Pawnee Manor Living Center, a home for the elderly. She is divorced, and her ex-husband, John Lambert, works at the Campbell's Soup factory in Tecumseh. Late in 1993, their daughter, Lisa, an unmarried single mother with a nine-month-old son, Tanner, was renting, for a hundred and twenty-five dollars a month, a ramshackle one-story farmhouse outside Humboldt. Tanner was the product of a brief encounter, and when Lisa became pregnant the boy's father abandoned her. Lisa had graduated from a community college and was working as a nurse's aide at the Colonial Acres nursing home, bathing, dressing, and feeding patients. Slight and pretty, Lisa Lambert was the sort of young woman who collected human strays and invited them to stay at her farmhouse. To supplement her income, she tended bar occasionally at Big Mike's, on Humboldt's town square, and she did not, according to another bartender at Big Mike's, "have an enemy in the world."

Shortly after 10 A.M. on December 31, 1993, Anna Mae Lambert drove up the narrow, rutted dirt path leading to Lisa's farmhouse with some things she had promised to drop off. Lisa's house was set among a stand of trees a quarter mile off the main road. Anna Mae Lambert noticed that the storm door was ajar and the front door was open, unusual in the bitter cold. She knocked on the door and received no response, but when she heard

Victoria Roberts

"We look better in winter."

Tanner crying inside she entered. "There was a Negro sitting on the floor in the living room in front of the couch," Anna Mae Lambert testified during Thomas Nissen's trial, fourteen months later. "I just kept right on going. I just went right on through to the bedroom where I knew Tanner's bed was. . . . I went straight to the crib and picked Tanner up." It was then that she turned around and saw Lisa on her water bed, not moving, with blood on her face. The water bed had been punctured, and the floor was soaked. There was another person lying across the foot of the bed. "All I saw was just—just the legs of the other person," Anna Mae Lambert testified. "I never looked at the body of the other person."

Anna Mae Lambert picked Tanner up from the crib and went out to the dining room, where she placed a call to the Humboldt police. "I reported that I was at my daughter's house," Anna Mae Lambert testified, "and that there was bodies there." Then she prepared a bottle for Tanner, heating it in the microwave oven. Scrupulously, she tried to avoid touching anything, explaining to the court that she was an emergency medical technician and had been trained in how to behave at a crime site. "I touched only what I needed to," Anna Mae Lambert said, "and then I only done it with one finger and a thumb, if at all possible." Anna Mae Lambert also avoided looking at the body of the black man in the living room. "When I was sitting with Tanner in the chair," she said, "I didn't look around. I just looked at him and fed him and talked to him." This quiet competence suggests a woman who would not have been out of place driving a covered wagon west across the empty prairie. There in a house surrounded by three bodies, including that of her daughter, her first priorities were to take care of her cold and crying grandson, and to maintain the integrity of the crime scene.

Lying face up on her water bed, wearing a long green shirt, black shorts, and maroon underpants, Lisa Lambert had been shot three times. There was a non-life-threatening wound through skin and subcutaneous tissue on the right side of her chest, and two bullets fired into her brain at such close range that there were powder burns on her head; one bullet entered through her right eye and exited below the right ear, destroying Lisa Lambert's face.

The black man lying against the couch in the living room had been shot twice. He was identified as Phillip DeVine, he was twenty-two years old, and he had come to Richardson County in mid-December to spend the Christmas holidays with a young Falls City woman he had met at the Job Corps training center in Denison, Iowa. Phillip DeVine was physically handicapped, with only a stump for a right leg, and a prosthetic device that attached below the knee. He was wearing both his prosthetic leg and the boot it fit into. The bullet that killed him entered his skull above the right eyebrow and lodged at the base of his brain.

The third victim, the young woman lying at the foot of Lisa Lambert's water bed, was also a recent arrival in Richardson County. Her name was Teena Renae Brandon, she was from Lincoln, and she had been in the Humboldt and Falls City area for less than two months. When Teena Brandon was killed, she was wearing black Jockey-style underwear, sweat shorts, a sweatshirt, a T-shirt, and sweat socks. Her killer had placed his weapon under her chin and fired; the bullet fractured her left mandible and lodged in the base of her brain underneath her right eye. A second bullet had exited the skull just below her right ear. It was impossible for the pathologist who conducted the autopsy to discern which bullet was fired first, but either would have killed her almost instantly, because both caused massive brain damage. Teena Brandon had also been stabbed, a wound that penetrated five inches into the right lobe of her liver and could have killed her if the two bullets into her skull had not.

That all three victims had been shot execution style indicated to investigators that robbery was probably not the reason the intruder or intruders had broken into the farmhouse. Nothing seemed to be missing, and little disturbed, except for the pierced water bed and the open front door, which had been violently pushed in from the outside. Of the three victims, Teena Brandon was the most familiar to authorities. Since her arrival in Richardson County, in November, she had been in and out of trouble with the law. Shortly before midnight on November 27th, she had been cited for M.I.P., or minor in possession of an open bottle of alcohol, after a car she was driving was involved in an accident. Teena Brandon had produced a driver's license belonging to a cousin named Charles Brayman, and it was as Charles Brayman that she signed the complaint, and was ordered to appear for a hearing at 2 P.M. on December 15th at the Richardson County Courthouse, in Falls City. That Teena Brandon had been able to pass herself off as a man to the officers citing her was not that surprising. In the circles in which she moved, she was known as Brandon, a young man down from Lincoln, and as Brandon she, as he, had declared his love for, and slept with, a num-

"Hold on a second, Bob. I'm putting you on a stickie."

ber of women in Falls City and Humboldt, including Lisa Lambert.

On December 15th, Teena Brandon, still posing as Charles Brayman, had shown up for her court date in Falls City and pleaded not guilty to the M.I.P. charge. Charles Brayman said he had the means to engage counsel and was released on his own recognizance. On his way out of the courthouse, Brayman was approached by a deputy sheriff, who addressed him as "Teena" and asked if he could speak to her upstairs in the sheriff's department.

Teena Brandon must have known the jig was up. She made no claim that her name was Charles Brayman, and accompanied the deputy to the sheriff's office, where she was shown three checks on which she had allegedly forged the name of Carrie Gross, a friend and former roommate, including one for $121.35. The checks, drawn on Gross's account at the First Federal Bank of Lincoln, had been cashed at the bank's Humboldt branch. A teller at the bank, shown a photo lineup after Carrie Gross told authorities that the endorsement signatures on the checks were not hers, had identified Teena Brandon as the woman who had cashed them. After the deputy read Brandon her Miranda rights, she confessed to the theft and was arrested on a charge of second-degree forgery. Later that afternoon, in the same courtroom where two and a half hours earlier she had appeared as Charles Brayman, she was remanded to the county jail as Teena R. Brandon, setting in motion the chain of events that ended, as if inevitably, with the murders in Humboldt early on the morning of December 31, 1993.

"Dickie and I were so relieved to hear that you were born with your hyphen."

• •

5.

WILLA CATHER, when she was a young girl growing up in Red Cloud, Nebraska, in the late eighteen-eighties, cropped her hair short in the sort of brush cut a Marine lieutenant might favor, often wore men's clothes, and called herself William Cather, and sometimes William Cather, M.D. Cather was so discreet about her lesbianism, according to her biographer Sharon O'Brien, that many critics regard her as either celibate or asexual. Her relationships with women had the virtue of constancy; she shared an apartment in New York with Edith Lewis for almost forty years, and her friendship with Isabelle McClung lasted nearly as long, and was even relatively untroubled by McClung's marriage.

If Cather's literary life was centered in New York, her talent was sustained by Nebraska. She understood what it was to be different in a small prairie town and how toxic its gossip and small-mindedness could be. "This guarded mode of existence was like living under a tyranny," the narrator says in "My Ántonia." "People's speech, their voices, their very glances, became furtive and repressed. Every individual taste, every natural appetite, was bridled by caution." Cather, however, was a woman of rank, money, and ability, and her observations proceeded from the heights of privilege: for her, this prairie tyranny was ultimately "material," the raw stuff of art.

Teena Brandon was the raw stuff distilled to its very essence, a young woman from that vast constituency living at or below society's safety net. The tyranny from which she could not escape was less that of gender than of class, a prison more tyrannical than Willa Cather's prairie town, especially in white America, where class distinctions are not supposed to exist. Hers was the marginalized world of mobile homes, grungy rentals, public housing, unemployment, welfare, service jobs, minimum wage, social workers, domestic abuse, sexual molestation, absent fathers, paternity tests, teen-age pregnancies, foster homes, court-ordered psychological counselling, learning centers rather than high schools, Job Corps, petty crime, felony convictions, and penitentiary hard time.

She was small and vaguely androgynous. Her hair was cut short and her clothes were loose-fitting, less masculine than unisex. Her background was the kind that in literature the protagonist tries to overcome. Teena's mother, JoAnn Brandon, gave birth to her first child, Tammy, when she was fourteen years old. Teena's father, Pat Brandon, had Sioux Indian blood. He worked hard-hat jobs, and with his young family lived in a mobile home off Cornhusker Highway in northeast Lincoln. When JoAnn Brandon was sixteen, and one month pregnant with Teena, Pat Brandon, only nineteen himself, was killed in an automobile accident. Years later, Teena Brandon would tell psychiatric counsellors that her father was drunk when his convertible rolled over and went off a bridge.

THIS fragile family background has been compellingly and encyclopedically documented by the true-crime writer Aphrodite Jones, who appeared in Falls City not long after the murders to research "All She Wanted," a book that she published as a paperback original. From the day of her arrival in town, Aphrodite Jones was a high-profile presence. A strikingly handsome woman with a mass of dark hair, she was the most glamorous thing to hit Falls City in a long time, and she was not unaware of it. She did not suffer competitors gladly, and, to make her position clear, she had the foresight to sign the Brandons and other principals in the case to contracts in which the signees agreed to "exclusively supply author with interviews, letters, photos and other pertinent documents to support the author's writing of the book and film project," effectively freezing out other reporters. The contract read that no money would change hands until or unless a "motion picture" was "released" from any book Jones would publish, at which point the signee would receive ten thousand dollars or ten per cent of the book's movie purchase price, whichever was greater; the prospect of this payment was so problematic as to barely exist, and would come to seem, for those who signed, just one more disappearing dream.

These were people for whom dreams tended to disappear. Circumstances—marriage before she was out of junior high school, two daughters and widowhood by the time she was seventeen—had dashed JoAnn Brandon's dream of becoming a model, a career that she thought might be available because she had modelled children's clothes for department-store catalogues. She moved back to her mother's house, where she began the arduous task of raising Tammy and Teena as a single parent, relying on the social-security checks that began to arrive after Pat Brandon's death. Shortly before Teena's second birthday, JoAnn Brandon embarked on a second marriage. She was nineteen; the marriage lasted five years.

JoAnn Brandon was a Catholic, and managed to send her daughters to parochial schools. Teena was a tomboy, her mother and Tammy told the interviewers who sought them out when Teena's murder was leading the news. She played with a garter snake instead of a doll; she liked to tinker with cars and take radios apart; she imagined herself quarterbacking the football team at Pius X High School. Then there were the stories about how she and her sister had been sexually molested by a male relative. It was as if somewhere in this litany of gender uncertainty, rejection by men, and furtive molestation there might be an early clue, a first cause, a reason that would make Teena's subsequent ventures across the gender divide easier to accommodate.

JoAnn Brandon's ability to control her daughters was compromised by her own hard relationships. Like tumbleweed, Tammy and Teena began to move about the underside of Lincoln, in and out of the houses and trailers of friends and lovers who made up a floating hegemony of rootless, unsupervised children. Teena moved in with Traci, then with Tammy, who had been involved with a man who beat her up. Tammy thought Teena might be stealing money from her, Aphrodite Jones reports, and the arguments between them forced Teena to move back in with JoAnn. As if to erase any lingering femininity, Teena bound her breasts with an elastic athletic bandage. When Operation Desert Storm was heating up, she tried to enlist in the Air Force, but was rejected after flunking the written test.

Tammy got pregnant, and decided to give up the child—a half-black daughter, who was adopted by a lesbian couple in San Francisco. Teena was distraught; the idea of being an aunt had appealed to her. Her best friend, Sara, got pregnant, and Teena suggested that she would like to help raise that baby, and perhaps adopt it. Illegitimacy is generally regarded as a black inner-city problem by middle-class whites, a comforting illusion. But twenty-two per cent of the white children born in 1991 were born out of wedlock; more than eighty per cent of these single mothers had only a high-school education or less, and sixty-nine per cent survived on less than twenty thousand dollars a year. On this rung of the social ladder, birth control was seen as a dreary restriction—messy, expensive, and unspontaneous—and, because babies conferred a kind of status on teen mothers with nothing much going for them, abortion was not considered an option.

6.

It is interesting to speculate on the degree of empathy Willa Cather might have displayed toward Teena Brandon. A clue can be found in her portrait of Ántonia Shimerda, the immigrant Bohemian servant girl who is the heroine of "My Ántonia." There was a certain Lady Bountiful aspect to Cather that perhaps led her to invest Ántonia with more decency, spirit, strength, and calm than any character can easily bear. I suspect that Teena Brandon would have made Cather impatient: Teena was socially and economically no more disadvantaged than Ántonia, and one can assume that Cather would have regarded her obsession with gender and its discontents as self-indulgent, and her gender confusion as an excuse to abdicate personal responsibility.

After leaving Sara's place, Teena Brandon was once again forced to live in her mother's mobile home, in a trailer court on Cornhusker Highway out past the state fairgrounds. The court was situated behind V.F.W. Post 131 ("Wednesday Bingo, Public Welcome"), Laura's Hair Care, and Close-Outs Unlimited, an outlet for tools. Across Cornhusker Highway was a line of grain elevators, and day and night a steady flow of Burlington Northern trains pulled away, hauling loaded grain cars to market. Many of the mobile homes had wind chimes, and when a breeze came up the effect was like listening to a concerto for xylophones. It was a place to come from, to get out of, but for Teena Brandon, not yet eighteen, Cornhusker Highway represented a comfort zone she seemed disinclined to leave. Unengaged by school, she failed to graduate from Pius X. She was undereducated, her ambition was limited, she had no specific gifts on which she could capitalize, and, most important, she was without positive sexual identity.

Destiny intervened, in late December, 1990, when a thirteen-year-old named Liz dialled a wrong number. Liz liked the sound of the unknown voice on the other end of the line, and the two began to flirt. The voice said his name was Billy Brinson. Liz proposed that she and Billy get together, and Billy was game. On New Year's Eve, Liz and Billy Brinson went on a roller-skating date. Billy Brinson, of course, was Teena Brandon, and she was finally cast in a part in which she felt comfortable: the Peter Pan mentor to a post-pubescent little girl.

Liz was followed quickly by Heather, who was fourteen, as Billy Brinson effortlessly retooled his name to Billy Brandon. He was a good kisser and an expert cuddler, and he stuffed socks into his shorts to give his groin the appearance of a male basket; later, he would wear a dildo. Billy moved out of JoAnn Brandon's mobile home and in with Heather and her mother, Ruth. He suggested to Heather that he was a hermaphrodite, or, alternatively, a man trapped inside a woman's body, explanations, JoAnn Brandon says, that Teena/Billy picked up from "The Montel Williams Show." Billy told Heather that he had undergone sex-change surgery, but as he refined the story over the next years he would claim that the process had only just begun, that there was something down there, it was small, but it would get bigger by the time all the operations were completed. In carnal situations, Brandon smoothly managed to avoid exposing his genitalia; the butch was always the toucher, never the touched, and in time he worked the references to future surgeries into a routine that passed muster with female companions prepared to take it on faith. Heather was unequipped or unwilling to express any doubts she might have entertained, so when Billy asked her to marry him she said yes; they decided to spend their honeymoon on a cruise.

When Teena (left) came to town, she introduced herself as Brandon and became the boy all the girls wanted to know. Lana Tisdel was Falls City's restless beauty, and Brandon fell in love with her.

COURTESY OF GRÉTA ÓLAFSDÓTTIR

The metamorphosis of Teena into Billy unhinged JoAnn Brandon. She left messages on Ruth's answering machine, saying that Heather and Billy were lesbians; her tone was so threatening that the police cited her for disturbing the peace. No one believed JoAnn when she kept insisting that Billy Brandon did not exist, that Billy was in fact her daughter Teena. Teena vehemently denied to her mother that she was a lesbian, adding to the strain between them.

BILLY was soon calling himself Brandon, and in the teen world of the underprivileged he had become a lady-killer of some proportion. Fidelity was not his long suit; Heather was followed by Reanna and Danielle and Lindsay and Gina and Daphne and uncounted others. The reality principle seemed not to apply; Heather went on the pill and Daphne claimed that Brandon got her pregnant. With his sexuality a constant source of conjecture, Brandon was nomadic, moving from place to place, girl to girl, seldom staying anywhere long. He picked up a bogus photo I.D. so he could get jobs as a temp, or a pizza delivery boy, or a vacuum-cleaner salesman working on commission. Brandon's idea of courtship, when some nymphet caught his fancy, was to pitch old-fashioned woo—shower the object of his affection with flowers and candy and pizzas and promise rings and marriage proposals. He rented a hotel suite and wore a tuxedo for a party to announce his engagement to Gina, and charged everything to the room; he collected the photos of this event into a scrapbook that he called his wedding album.

To pay for this extravagance, Teena Brandon had fallen into the bad habit of stealing. A.T.M. cards were one source of income, and forged checks another. In general, she, as he, stole only from friends or the parents of friends. Surprisingly, some victims were willing to defend him; they saw Brandon as a Nebraska Robin Hood, in that the presents he charged on other people's credit cards were not for himself but for his girlfriends. Not everyone was so forgiving. In the early months of Teena Brandon's gender masquerade, the Lincoln Police Department started a rap sheet on her; its first listing was "Arrested 03-13-91" for possession of stolen property, "found guilty, fined $500." She also served three days in jail. The arrests

"It's not enough that we succeed. Cats must also fail."

mounted up, but in most instances the cases were dismissed, the charges were dropped, or the county attorney declined to prosecute.

In October, 1991, however, Teena Brandon was arrested on a forgery charge, and this time she could not talk her way out of it. Before her case came to trial, however, she had a high-decibel fight with Heather over her true identity: man or woman, Brandon or Teena. In its aftermath, according to Aphrodite Jones, she swallowed a bottle of antibiotics and was rushed to the hospital. A week later, she was admitted to the Lancaster County Crisis Center, in Lincoln, where she was placed under suicide alert. After a week's hospitalization, she was discharged from the Crisis Center, where therapists had diagnosed her as a transsexual with a personality disorder.

In March, 1992, in a Lancaster County District courtroom, Teena Brandon was convicted of second-degree forgery, and was sentenced to eighteen months' probation, under the terms of which she would agree to undergo psychological counseling, not consume alcoholic beverages, get a high-school equivalency diploma, or G.E.D., and make restitution in the amount of $186.49 to Food Bonanza, where she passed one of the forged checks. Probation, even for a felony, did not make Teena Brandon any less feckless. "Attendance is sporadic & infrequent," the psychological clinician assigned to her at the Lancaster County Mental Health Center wrote. Four months later, the counsellor reported, "Teena does what is needed to get by. No changes noted in taking responsibility, personal growth, or attitude." Two months after that, Teena Brandon was terminated from the program. "She told so many different versions of things it was hard to know what to believe," the counsellor wrote in her last report. "Further therapy is unlikely to be of help."

In spite of her probation, new entries piled up in Teena Brandon's arrest history. She seemed blithely unconcerned; lying came naturally to her, and because lying is the lingua franca of the court system she was in her element. She consistently put off court dates, and her excuses were all of the-dog-ate-my-homework variety:

"I have a final that I have to take that can not be taken at any other time, to get through school."

"My grandfather passed away this week. Dan Maupin was his name."

"I have to finish taking my classes and I have only two full weeks to finish them."

"I need to retake my drivers test to recieve my Driver's Permit, and I have another couple of test to take for my GED for probation that day, and I am trying to not miss to many days of work, sir."

"I had a family emergency that is in South Sioux City. My aunt had been in a hit and run accident and was seriously injured. She has taken care of me since I was little."

"My last requests was because my aunt was in an accident and in serious condition. She passed away Wed 29, 1993, and her funeral is on the Mon 4 of October, and the family would like to go Fri morning—my only transportation up there."

OUTSIDE the criminal-justice system, Teena Brandon still functioned as the young man called Brandon, and for Brandon there was always a new girl. Never entirely certain of Brandon's masculinity, these teen-agers explained his attraction in the impoverished and self-dramatizing rhetoric of adolescence: *He was the only one for me. . . . He was so cute. . . . I fell madly in love. . . . I worshipped the ground he walked on. . . . He was a perfect gentleman. . . . He knew how a woman wanted to be treated. . . . He gave me a teddy bear. . . . He broke my heart. . . . He was using me. . . . He was the biggest cheat around. . . . He was playing games with me. . . . He made me lose my faith in men.* Many of these child-women had experience with domestic abuse and sexual molestation. They resided on a social frontier where women expected to get battered, where violence against their persons was accepted as a clause in the human contract. Brandon's appeal was that he was an unthreatening romantic, a lean and unmuscular quasi-man who offered sex without pregnancy or fisticuffs.

I talked about this appeal with a female-to-male cross-dresser I had contacted in New York. "I did a lot of things Teena Brandon did, but not so rambunctious," she told me. "He made them feel good. And when you start feeling good there's a lot of mental editing that goes on. The butch pays for things. He opens doors, buys the movie tickets." That Brandon might be a hermaphrodite was a story many of his conquests accepted with few questions, in order to reconcile what they were doing with him in bed. "It's a grade-school approach to sexuality," my contact said. Teena Brandon's thievery "was part of the trip. It's a danger trip. She was out on the edge, pushing the envelope." Street culture had penetrated the larger cities of the heartland, and Teena Brandon's constant moving around Lincoln, house to house, trailer to trailer, was life at the squatter's mean street level. "The survival thing can come apart any second," my contact said. "On the street you're bound to meet other social outlaws. You just hope they're not sociopaths."

Even the real possibility of prison did not deter Teena Brandon from forging more checks and stealing more A.T.M. cards in order to meet the financial demands of courtship. By the fall of 1993, she had violated so many conditions of the probation received for her 1992 forgery conviction that a Lancaster County judge had issued a statewide warrant for her arrest. Her friend Gina discovered that the presents Brandon had given her had been charged on Gina's credit card. Early in September, Teena Brandon was arrested for forging a bank withdrawal slip for a hundred and thirty-five dollars, a second felony when she was still on probation for the first.

Teena Brandon's world was contracting. She was a woman whose entire survival strategy was based on not wanting to face certain facts; she had detoured around what she did not wish to see, compartmentalized what she did see, moved on, started over. Imagine her state of mind: If she was sent to prison, she would be adrift in the overt lesbian culture that thrives in confinement. Her continued insistence that she was not gay eliminated retreat into the gay communities of Lincoln and Omaha, where she could have been sheltered and nourished. Her only alternative was to take her sexual ambiguity and lie low in a place where no one knew her.

That opportunity came in November. Daphne had a friend named Carrie Gross. Carrie Gross happened to be crashing in a farmhouse outside Humboldt, an hour and a half south of Lincoln. With Charles Brayman as a fallback alias, Teena Brandon decamped for Richardson County, to hole up in the Humboldt farmhouse along with Carrie, Carrie's boyfriend, Mike, and Lisa Lambert, whose place it was. Her diminishing choices notwithstanding, Teena Brandon's brio remained intact, and she acted as if her problems would never catch up with her.

7.

WILLIAM HOLDEN, as Hal Carter in the 1955 movie made from William Inge's Pulitzer Prize winning Broadway play, "Picnic," hopped off a freight passing through a sere Kansas farm town one Labor Day morning, and as soon as his feet hit the ground the hormones of the local females began to bubble. Full of self-pity and grandiose failed schemes, Carter claimed that he'd had a Hollywood screen test, and that the studio had wanted to rename him Brush Carter. In fact, he was only a drifter and braggart who wanted to be anything but the "bum" that, in a fleeting flash of honesty, he said he was. Hal Carter was someone new in the claustrophobic emptiness of a small town, where being "new" offered immediate entrée, and of course he took up with Madge Owens, the prettiest girl in town. Madge's mother, an abandoned wife who had reared her two daughters alone, wanted someone better than Hal Carter for her oldest child, to which Madge, a nineteen-year-old five-and-dime clerk whose sole negotiable asset was her looks, could only reply, "You don't love someone because he's perfect."

The arrival of Brandon in Richardson County had much the same effect as Hal Carter's Labor Day stopover in Inge's Kansas town. Around the lumpen hangouts where the underemployed young gathered, Brandon quickly became a familiar figure, a regular at the Oasis karaoke club and at the Kwik Shop, a gas station and minimart on Harlan Street. "He was hot," said a waitress at the Falls City Frosty Queen, and that was the only reference Brandon needed to start operating again. Lisa Lambert was the first to succumb to his charms, and Brandon's immediate offer to adopt her infant son, Tanner, seemed to vouch for his intentions. Lisa claimed that she actually had intercourse with Brandon, Aphrodite Jones tells us, although Lisa added the caveat that she was drunk at the time. There remained the puzzle, however, of the tampon wrappers someone had discarded into the heating vents at the farmhouse; the wrappers did not come from Lisa's tampons, and her other roommate, Carrie Gross, was pregnant, and not menstruating. It was a puzzle that Lisa Lambert chose not to address.

Brandon was cute, but Brandon was also fickle, and he was already turning his attention to Kelli, another nymphet at the Frosty Queen. Lisa was broken-hearted, and poured out her feelings in a letter to Brandon, wondering how she had failed him, how their love might be repaired. She need not have worried about Kelli, who was only a pit stop on Brandon's romantic odyssey. He had, it seemed, finally found true love. Her name was Lana Tisdel, and to Brandon she was Madge Owens in "Picnic."

8.

THE Tisdel sisters, Lana and her elder sibling, Leslie, were a Falls City itch that every local stud at loose ends felt impelled to scratch. Some branches of the Tisdel family were local gentry. Lana and Leslie's aunt, Virginia Tisdel, had spearheaded a drive for a war memorial honoring Richardson County's dead from the Second World War, Korea, and Vietnam; a plaque in the courthouse lobby made special mention of "Mrs. Virginia 'Ginny' Tisdel" for her efforts as "Project Chairman & Coordinator." When Lana's father, Leland, wedded Linda Gutierres, the tonier Tisdels thought that he had married below the salt, and kept Linda at a distance. Leland and Linda finally split up, and their daughters, Leslie and Lana, bounced back and forth between their parents. Linda received disability payments, and she and her daughters, when they were around, lived in cheap rentals. In the fall of 1993, the three were together in a Falls City house that was a crash pad for transients, boyfriends, and miscreants either wanted by or of interest to the authorities.

Leslie Tisdel was loud, overweight, hard to handle. In and out of juvenile detention, she was drawn into a series of abusive relationships with men; at sixteen, she attempted suicide, and at seventeen she gave birth to a half-black daughter, Jasmine. Her life was so volatile that her mother, Linda, forced her to grant custody of Jasmine to an older married half sister, Jerrilyn, who had no children of her own. In the fall of 1993, Leslie Tisdel, trying to pull her life together, applied for the federal Job Corps program, and was sent to the Job Corps center in Denison, Iowa, a place invariably identified as the home town of Donna Reed.

Job Corps, however, was not a reflection of the middle-class America portrayed in "The Donna Reed Show." The center was in effect a boot camp for deprived youths. Wake-up was at 6:15 A.M., and students had to be in their rooms by 10 P.M.; profanity and racial epithets were monitored under "behavior management" strictures. The stress was on discipline and "zero tolerance" of drugs and alcohol; any student caught violating zero tolerance was immediately expelled. When I visited the center, in June, 1996, a hundred and eight students had been dismissed in the previous twelve months, forty-five for assault, sixty-three for possession of controlled substances; with a student population of two hundred and eighty-seven, the termination rate was better than one in three. It was in this environment that Leslie Tisdel met Phillip DeVine.

Phillip DeVine's life was not without hardship of its own. Because of a defective presciption drug that his mother had taken during pregnancy, he was born two months premature, with a damaged heart, crossed eyes, lungs that were permanently scarred, and a right leg that ended at the knee. In spite of his physical torment, he had grown into a strapping youth, so agile on his prosthetic leg that he was able to compete vigorously in sandlot sports. When he was still a child, his parents divorced acrimoniously, and he spent most of his time with his father, first in California, then in Maryland. During his childhood, his mother had become an acolyte of the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, the founder of transcendental meditation. She ran TM seminars, and after a journey of exploration to Ethiopia had changed her name from Phyllis to Aisha, which in Arabic, she said, means "the living one." Ultimately, she remarried, left California, and moved to Fairfield, Iowa, where the Maharishi University of Management is situated. Subsequently, Phillip DeVine decided to join her in Fairfield, but, when Fairfield palled, the Job Corps center in western Iowa beckoned.

Phillip Devine flourished in Denison. He was active in the center's Business Professionals of America chapter, and was selected to attend a Job Corps conference in Washington, where he met Iowa's two senators and was presented as one of the program's model citizens. It was only a coincidence that he was in Denison when Leslie Tisdel arrived, but that coincidence would cost him his life. In the fall of 1993, he had broken his good left leg playing touch football and had to withdraw from the Job Corps while it healed. Had he not broken his leg, he would, as planned, have transferred to another Job Corps center, in Colorado, and not run into Leslie Tisdel.

The center's rigid rules chafed against Leslie Tisdel's independent nature, but she and Phillip DeVine immediately connected. Leslie hoped to regain custody of Jasmine, and Phillip indicated that he was willing to act as Jasmine's father. Life moved so fast in these circles that it seemed of little consequence that the two hardly knew each other; Phillip DeVine was black, and that made him a perfect stepfather candidate for the half-black Jasmine. Leslie Tisdel finally withdrew from the Job Corps, but not before she invited Phillip DeVine to spend Christmas in Falls City.

Leslie's sister, Lana, was nineteen years old in 1993, a femme fatale with a fitful sex drive; she told a friend that once a week was more than enough. Somehow she had escaped the unwed-motherhood that burdened so many of her contemporaries. Lana had not graduated from high school nor was she employed; she passed her time driving around Falls City and singing karaoke at the Oasis. Early in December, 1993, Brandon hit on Lana, an encounter that effectively erased both Lisa Lambert and Kelli of the Frosty Queen from his radar screen. The next day, Brandon took Lana to lunch at Hardee's, and that night took her to see "Addams Family Values" at the local movie house. On December 12th, Brandon failed to show up at the party Lisa was giving in Humboldt to celebrate his twenty-first birthday, bringing that romance to a screaming halt. Brandon moved from Humboldt into Linda Gutierres's house, and Lana Tisdel's bed. The sex was good, Lana reported, and Brandon stood up to pee—a modest endorsement of a heterosexual bedfellow.

Phillip DeVine had also shown up to spend the holidays in Falls City at Linda Gutierres's house, but daily proximity soon made Leslie Tisdel less fond than she had been in Denison. Soon after his arrival, she began complaining that he was too possessive. This minor turbulence seemed only to enhance the ongoing party at the house. The regulars were Leslie, Lana, Brandon, Phillip, and a couple of small-time local ex-convicts, John Lotter and Thomas Nissen. Nissen and Lotter horsed around with Brandon, swapping stories about the slickest ways to get laid, and played cards with Phillip DeVine; they both called Linda Gutierres "Mom," and used her house to hook up with their girlfriends, Missy Wisdom and Rhonda McKenzie. Missy, Linda Gutierres's teen-age half sister, was carrying on with Nissen, who was rarely faithful to his wife, Kandi, a wanderer herself, while Rhonda was the mother of Lotter's infant daughter, Rochelle. Everyone knew everyone else. Life was a beach.

9.

WHEN Brandon was arrested, on December 15th, for forging the checks on Carrie Gross's bank account, he was identified in the Richardson County jail as "Teena Brandon." Teena Brandon's appearance bond was twenty-five hundred dollars, and she spent a week in the lockup, wearing a V-necked orange prisoner's jumper that, Lana Tisdel noticed while visiting her in jail, revealed her breasts when she leaned over. On December 22nd, Lana Tisdel was finally able to make the ten-per-cent payment that sprang Teena from custody. The two hundred and fifty dollars was written on a signed blank check that Lana's father, Leland Tisdel, had given her to get her hair done, but, because Lana was underage, the bond agreement was actually signed by Thomas Nissen, whom she had met only a few weeks before, and who was already smitten with her and her friends.

Once out of jail, Teena Brandon again tried, as if nothing had happened, to pass herself off as Brandon and lead a social life as an unemployed young man about Falls City. But she was now clearly identified as a woman, and was no longer welcomed by Linda Gutierres, who was furious at her daughter's liaison with Teena. Since Lisa Lambert had thrown her off the farm in Humboldt after the check forgeries, Teena camped out wherever she could, including in Thomas Nissen's house.

Housekeeping and child rearing had never been Kandi Nissen's strong suits; her children ran free and the house was a pigpen of dirty dishes, unemptied wastebaskets, and moldy French fries stuck on couches, but it was a place where Teena could stay. On Christmas Eve, Nissen had a party that turned ugly as the guests—the Tisdel sisters, Teena Brandon, Phillip DeVine, and assorted misfits who had spent too much time inside the penal system—fuelled themselves with liquor. Nissen and John Lotter, strangers only a month before, had become constant drinking companions and fuck buddies, prison toughs obsessed with proving once and for all what they and everyone else already knew: that Brandon was a woman.

Dressed in jeans and a loose-fitting shirt, Teena cooed with Lana Tisdel in the squalor of the living room and was the object of drunken threats from Lotter and Nissen. Teena had always been able to talk her way out of such situations, but Lotter and Nissen were not to be denied. As Christmas Eve wore on, they took Teena into a bathroom and removed her pants and underwear to reveal her pubic symphysis. Even this did not satisfy them. After everyone else left or went to bed, Nissen and Lotter carried Teena Brandon outside to Lotter's Crown Victoria and drove to the Hormel plant at the edge of town, where, in the back seat of the car, they proceeded to penetrate her vaginally and anally. Then Nissen beat her up. When they finished, they drove her back to Nissen's house, told her to clean up, and warned her of the consequences if she reported the assault. While pretending to take a shower, Teena squeezed out the bathroom window; bruised and bleeding, she made her way to Linda Gutierres's house. Leslie Tisdel called the police. Teena's lip was cut, her face was red and swollen, and she had a welt on her back shaped like the sole of a boot. At the Falls City Community Hospital, a rape-kit examination indicated vaginal bleeding and trauma, and there were semen specimens in both her anus and her vagina.

On Christmas Day, Teena Brandon filed a rape complaint against Lotter and Nissen, and was interrogated by the Richardson County sheriff, Charles Laux. It is difficult to listen to the tape of that interrogation without wondering if Sheriff Laux might not have thought that Teena Brandon had only got what was coming to her. He was salacious, accusing, and derogatory, referring to her "box" and to the sex act as "sinking it in." "Why do you run around with girls instead of guys, being you're a girl yourself?" Laux asked. "Why do you make girls think you're a guy?" "I have a sexual identity crisis," Teena Brandon whispered. When asked where she was first entered, her voice was barely audible: "My vagina." It was as if the admission that she had a vagina were a worse humiliation than the actual penetration.

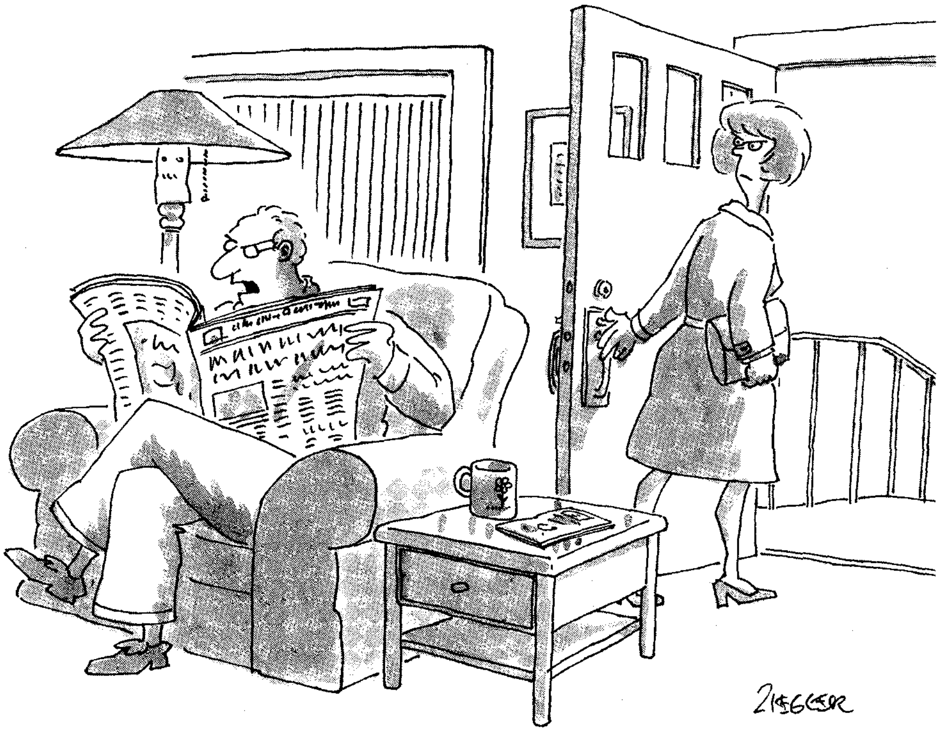
After the Humboldt murders, Laux and Douglas Merz, the Richardson County attorney, scrambled to explain why they had not arrested Nissen and Lotter after Teena Brandon's Christmas Day complaint. Laux argued that Teena Brandon lacked credibility because she had passed herself off as Charles Brayman. For his part, Merz claimed that Teena's charges were insufficiently corroborated, and that even with Nissen and Lotter's extensive criminal records, there was not enough evidence to arrest them and put them in the county jail, if only to cool off over the holidays. Given the results of the rape-kit examination, this was a decision vigorously disputed, in retrospect, by other law-enforcement officials throughout the state. "If this was your daughter, sister, or mother that was assaulted," a sheriff from Scotts Bluff County asked, "would it take this long?" And the sheriff of Clay County: "They should have been arrested that night."

Later that Christmas Day, Linda Gutierres warned Nissen and Lotter that Teena had ratted them out; three days later, both men officially denied to local authorities that they had either assaulted or raped her. The question now facing Teena Brandon was where she could go. If she went home to Lincoln, she faced incarceration in the Nebraska Center for Women for violating the terms of her 1992 probation; in Falls City, she was looking at a felony conviction for forgery. Nissen and Lotter had warned her not to report the rape, and she had. She was a pariah. Her confidence faltered, then returned when Lisa Lambert said that she could come back to the Humboldt farmhouse. Leslie Tisdel had broken up with Phillip DeVine, and he, too, was offered shelter by Lisa Lambert until his mother could forward him the money to buy a bus ticket home to Iowa.

However few her options, Teena Brandon still acted as if being a she-man were a viable role, and in the days that followed she cruised the roads between Humboldt and Falls City, hanging out with Lana Tisdel, avoiding Nissen and Lotter. There was danger, but even though she told her mother that Nissen and Lotter had threatened to kill her, she did not have the imaginative range to consider the idea that she was truly at risk.

10.

Violence is the way stupid people try to level the playing field. Lotter and Nissen: their sociopathic curricula vitae were so similar as to be almost interchangeable. Psychiatric instability, tumultuous family lives, absentee parents, trigger tempers, suicidal tendencies, foster



"I see there's an excellent sale on diddly-squat at the Zilchtown Mall in Nowheresville, New Jersey."

homes, a fascination with lethal objects, juvenile detention, sexual promiscuity, substance abuse, crime (theft and attempted burglary for Lotter, arson for Nissen), prison. As a child, John Lotter was hyperactive and a slow learner, and would use whatever weapon he could lay his hands on—hammer, pencil, knife—to beat up and injure other children. A juvenile court declared him uncontrollable, and he became a ward of the state; he was, in fact, so uncontrollable that he was turned down by Boys Town, which seemed to disprove Father Edward Flanagan's piety that there was no such thing as a bad boy. He stayed in a foster home sporadically, attended five schools in six years, and spent four of the six years before the Humboldt murders in custody. The only person who could get through to him was Lana Tisdel, who had known him since they were children, and with whom he maintained an off-and-on relationship between incarcerations.

Nissen's mother, Sharon, was pregnant with her first child (out of wedlock) when she was fourteen, and married Ed Nissen after a ten-day courtship when she was fifteen; when his parents split up, Nissen, then two, moved to Mississippi with his father. In adolescence, according to Aphrodite Jones, he began stealing cars (including an eighteen-wheeler), flirted with white supremacy, and finally moved back to Falls City to live with his mother, who was now married to an ex-con and carrying a full rap sheet of her own—bad checks, D.W.I., resisting arrest. Nissen ran off to a homeless shelter in Washington state, then returned to Nebraska, where he landed in the arms of Kandi Gibson, a sixteen-year-old unmarried mother with a six-month-old daughter. Their relationship was so volatile that Nissen enlisted in the Army. He soon went over the hill and travelled with a carnival before going back to Kandi. They were married in June, 1992; a few days later, Nissen began cheating on his wife. Twenty-three days after his marriage, he was arrested for setting two fires in Falls City; he was convicted of second-degree arson, and in September of 1992 received a prison sentence of one to three years.

The penitentiary offered Lotter and Nissen the only structured environment they had ever really experienced. Survival in prison is predicated on a simple premise: power rules. Sexual imperialism flourishes; the weak belong to the strong. According to someone who did time with him, Lotter attracted the attention of a convict with the discomforting nickname of "Tugboat." In the predicament they found themselves in after Teena Brandon's Christmas interrogation, Lotter and Nissen reverted to the penitentiary premise. If they had been powerless in prison, here was a situation where they thought they had the power. They did not want to go back to prison, and they thought Teena Brandon could make a rape charge stick. It was as if, having threatened to kill her if she talked, they thought a failure to carry through on that threat would be considered less than manly.

Logic seemed a missing chromosome. Rape is historically difficult to prosecute, and county sheriffs and small-town police in rural jurisdictions are often less than diligent in the pursuit of the accused, who will invariably argue that the sex was consensual. Charges are usually dropped, generally when the alleged victim refuses to testify, as Teena Brandon, whose history was to cut and run in the face of trouble, might well have done. Rape is a crime, moreover, that rarely has witnesses; if charges are brought, the case usually degenerates into a disputatious litany of "he said, she said." That a jury was unlikely to convict Lotter and Nissen of rape, especially given Teena Brandon's gender ambiguity, was a factor they seemed never to consider. What they also failed to consider was that murder would be easier to prove than rape, and that if the putative rape victim was killed they would be the top suspects.

THEIR plans began to take shape the day after Christmas. "It was a combined idea," Nissen would testify when he appeared as a state's witness against Lotter. "I mean, me and John Lotter arrived at it by talking about and just goin' on and on with the conversation." A special prosecutor from the state attorney general's office asked if they had discussed the method of execution. "To chop her hands and her head off," Nissen answered. His voice sounded computer-generated. "In order that the body couldn't be identified." And the tools for the execution? "Took a hatchet, a rope, and a change of clothing." Why the change of clothing? "In the event that blood was on the clothes."

Thinking that Teena Brandon might have gone back to Lincoln, Lotter and Nissen drove there the day after Christmas with their murder paraphernalia, staking out three residences they had found in the address book Teena had left behind after the rape on Christmas Eve. In fact, Teena Brandon was still in Richardson County. Returning to Falls City, Nissen and Lotter festered through the week, making and discarding plans to murder Teena, and by so doing solve what they still regarded as their only problem. This would also avenge Lana Tisdel, who in their minds had been taken advantage of by a sexual deviate.

Their inchoate rage inflamed by a five-day drunk, Lotter and Nissen finally worked up the nerve to act. In the early hours of December 31, 1993, they set out in Lotter's Crown Victoria to find Teena Brandon. They made three stops before leaving Falls City. From his mother's house, Lotter took a knife belonging to his father and two pairs of work gloves. The next stop was at the home of a friend named Eddie Bennett, who with his wife, Amy, was entertaining another couple. Nissen stayed in the car while Lotter went inside. On the pretext of using the bathroom, Lotter went into the bedroom and stole a .380-calibre semi-automatic handgun that Bennett kept in a dresser drawer; on the way out of the house, Lotter stopped to feel up Amy Bennett. The last stop was at the house of Linda Gutierres, who told them that Teena Brandon, along with Phillip DeVine, was staying with Lisa Lambert, outside Humboldt.

Question to Nissen from the special prosecutor: "As you drove to Humboldt from Falls City that night, was there any discussion along the way of what was going to happen once you got there?"

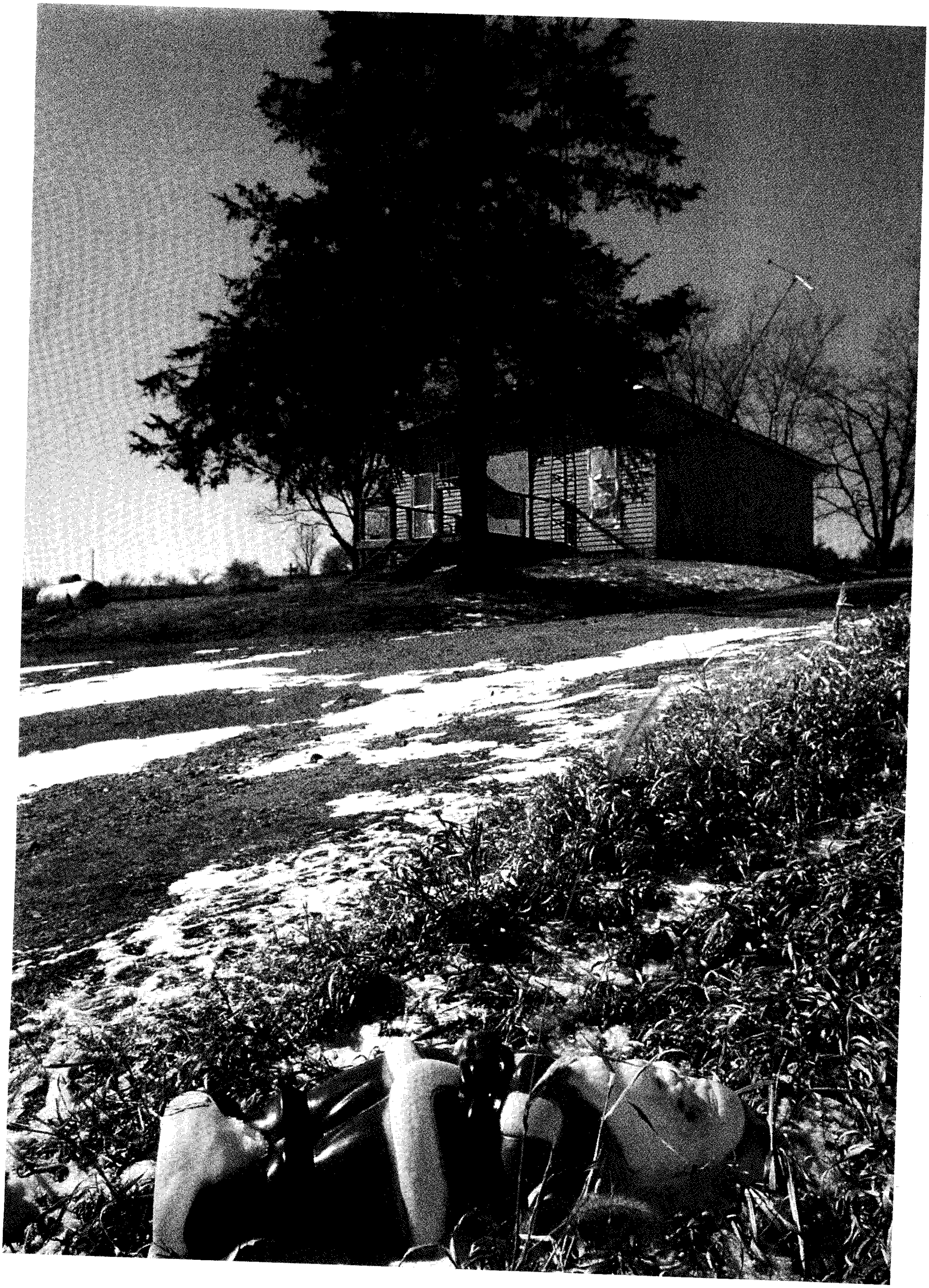
Answer from Nissen: "Me and John Lotter talked about killing Teena Brandon, and I told John Lotter . . . that if he shot Teena Brandon and there was other people around, that the other people would have to be killed also."

II.

THEY were in the farmhouse for no more than five minutes. According to Nissen's time line, Lotter first shot Teena Brandon, whom they discovered hiding under Lisa Lambert's bed; for good measure, Nissen stabbed her in the

The murders occurred in a house (opposite) that Lisa Lambert, a single mother, rented for a hundred and twenty-five dollars a month. She was the sort of young woman who collected human strays and invited them to stay.

KENT MEIREIS/THE DENVER POST MAGAZINE



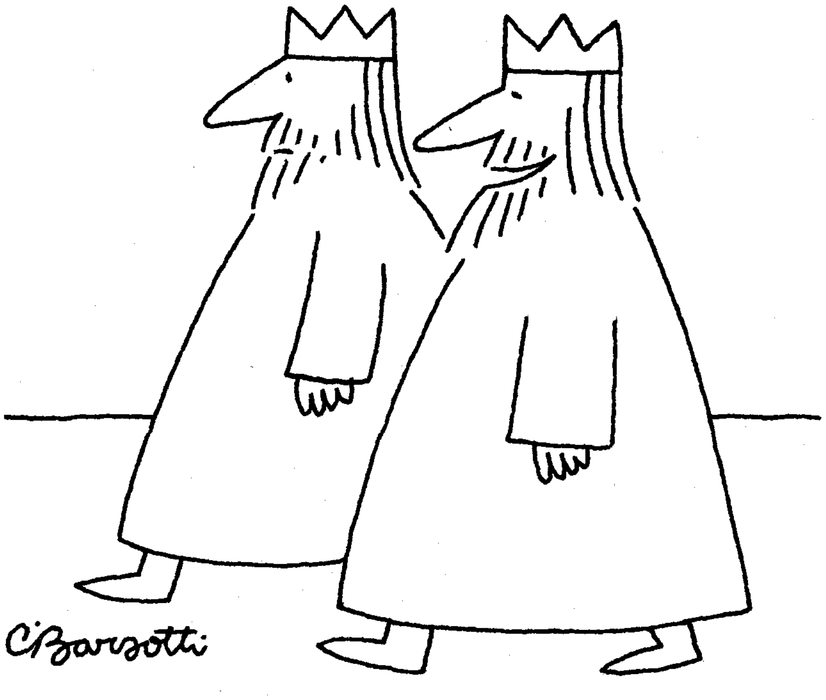
stomach, the only admission of life-threatening behavior in his self-serving account of what happened that night. Nissen said that Lotter was responsible for all the shootings, and he even claimed to have removed Lisa Lambert's son, Tanner, from his mother's arms before Lotter fired the second shot, which killed her. In Nissen's version, Lotter led Phillip DeVine from the second bedroom, where he had been hiding, into the living room; Nissen told DeVine to sit down on the couch, at which point Lotter shot him in the head.

Nissen's account of the murders, devised as it was to avoid a death sentence, lacks coherence. Phillip DeVine was a large, athletic man, and was wearing his prosthetic leg when he was killed. To believe Nissen's chronology, it would be necessary to accept that DeVine was cowering in the second bedroom as shots were fired and both the killers and their victims were screaming at the top of their lungs. It beggars the imagination that DeVine would not have tried either to escape or to come to the aid of Lisa Lambert and Teena Brandon. If he had crashed out a window into the frigid darkness, he could not have been worse off than he ended up. The prosecutors, however, were not interested in such speculation; their priority was to get a conviction, and Nissen's testimony, as given, was enough to put Lotter on death row and Nissen in prison for life.

Five minutes in the farmhouse, three people dead. Nissen and Lotter drove into Kansas on the way home, so as to approach Falls City from the south rather than from the north; if they were spotted, they would be seen coming not from Humboldt but from the opposite direction—con cunning. On the outskirts of Falls City, they stopped and threw the gloves, the handgun, and the knife into the Nemaha River. The river, however, was frozen, and the objects remained on the ice, where investigators found them after Anna Mae Lambert discovered the bodies at her daughter's house, and the alarm went out to pick up Nissen and Lotter. The knife was in a sheath, and on the sheath was marked the owner's name—"LOTTER."

12.

On winter roads, the twenty-six-mile drive from Falls City to Humboldt takes thirty-one minutes. Rational people might assume that during that half hour the fevers of vengeance would subside. Criminals, except when carrying out a contract Mafia hit or during a territorial dispute among drug dealers, do not deliberately embark on a mission they know will result in multiple murders. At some point, self-preservation kicks in and, with it, the sure understanding that the killing of three people will increase the penalties exponentially. With Nissen and Lotter, there was an almost delusionary disengagement from reality. They were like the characters in Oliver Stone's "Natural Born Killers," high on doing it. A month before, Nissen had not even known Lotter and Lana Tisdel, and here he was on a murder mission with one on behalf of the other. I kept trying to imagine the scene when they left the farmhouse. There was no escape, no place to run. They must have known that they would be the prime suspects, but they made no attempt to flee. On the ride back to Falls City, did they fight, argue, blame Teena Brandon for what they had done? They both had grown up in Nebraska, knew the bitter cold of the Nebraska winter, knew that the rivers froze, but still they threw their weapons onto the ice-covered Nemaha, because—I can only think—killers in gangster pictures throw their guns into the river after a hit. Their single alibi attempt was to order Kandi Nissen and Rhonda McKenzie to lie if asked what time the two returned to Nissen's house—1 A.M. was the time they agreed on. Then they went to sleep, Rhonda and Lotter on the floor in Nissen's living room, Nissen and Kandi in their bedroom. I wondered if they had sex, one last spasmatic release before investigators came the next day to arrest them and return them to a world where Tugboat was sovereign.

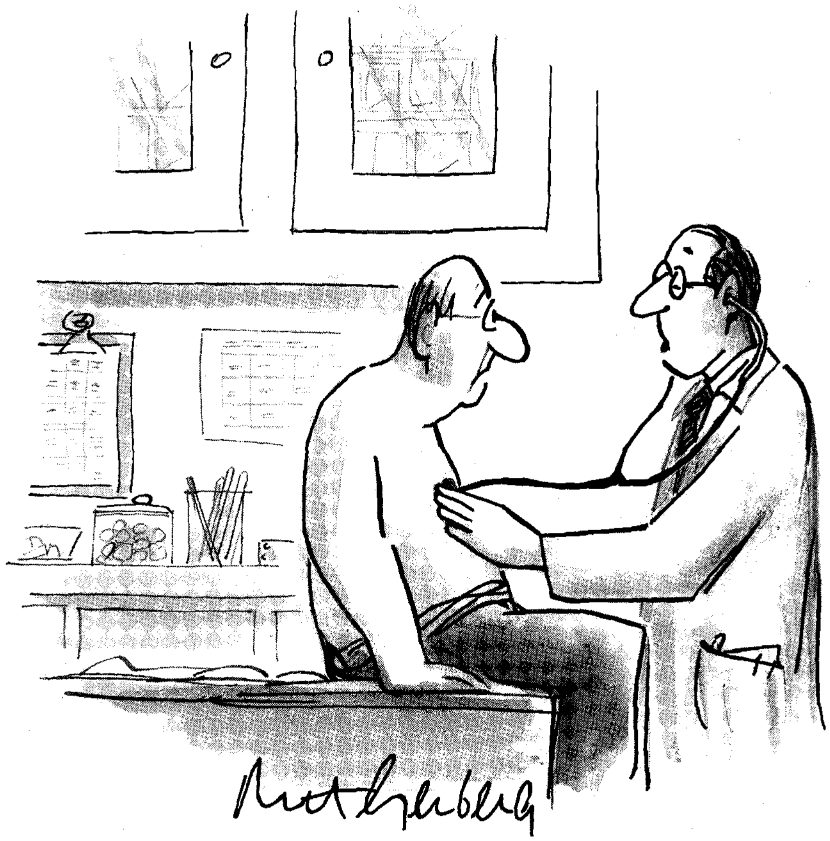


"*Sure, we were dysfunctional, but, by God, we were* royal."

13.

The Falls City on display in the courthouse during the trials of Thomas Nissen and John Lotter was a meaner, more marginal segment of the community than the Chamber of Commerce might have chosen to emphasize. The perils of bad weather, too much television, and a sugar-saturated junk-food diet were all too apparent in the abundance of fifty-six-inch waists in the corridors. Awaiting hearings or their turn to testify were women and men with the rolling gait of sailors home from the sea, their girth making it difficult to put one leg directly in front of the other. JoAnn Brandon arrived every morning from Lincoln, a two-hour drive. She was slight, her face all sharp planes etched with grief, a Dorothea Lange character study; she was always accompanied by her now married and pregnant older daughter, Tammy Schweitzer.

There were also supporters like Jennifer, a sixteen-year-old with a teardrop tattoo on her right hand. Jennifer had known Teena for eighteen months, and took a laissez-faire attitude toward her gender disorientation. "It didn't bother me at all," she said. "She was a good person. However she wanted to be, it was her life." I



"Good. Now start it up again."

had the distinct impression that for Jennifer the courthouse promised more than any school could offer. In fact, she did not attend school, but went to a Learning Center in Lincoln, where, under the auspices of the juvenile authorities, she was trying to earn her G.E.D. I asked what she learned at the Learning Center. "Shadowing," she said. And what was shadowing? "You shadow people in some job to see what the requirements are. Like if I wanted to be a reporter, I'd shadow you."

The Brandons were available to the press, and to gay and transgender activists, who took an almost proprietary interest in them. One referred to Teena Brandon's murder as "the gay O. J. Simpson case"; it was as if Lisa Lambert and Phillip DeVine were only supporting players. Before the Lotter trial, several dozen transsexuals drawn to Falls City by appeals on the Internet demonstrated in support of Teena Brandon outside the courthouse; many wore T-shirts lettered with the words "Transsexual Menace."

Unlike the Brandons, Anna Mae Lambert politely declined to discuss the case. In the courtroom, she sat with her ex-husband, John Lambert, and her companion, John Lange, weathered men in jeans and flannel shirts. The three of them were an island of quiet dignity, doing nothing to draw attention to themselves or their sorrow. From the photographs of Lisa Lambert, it was apparent how much she would have resembled her mother had she lived into middle age. Yet there was never a hint from Anna Mae and John Lambert that Lisa might still have been alive if Teena Brandon had not turned up in Richardson County. Blame as an idea seemed as foreign to them as resentment. What happened to Lisa was like a plane crash or a car accident, something that had gone terribly wrong.

If there was antagonism in the courtroom, it was directed mainly at the Tisdel sisters and their mother, Linda Gutierres. The three knew that Nissen and Lotter were headed for Humboldt on the night of the murders; they knew they were drunk, they knew of their propensity for violence, they knew of the threats against Teena Brandon, yet they did not telephone the farmhouse. During an early proceeding, I was talking in court to a spectator named Snooks Hayes, a rangy, rawboned woman who wore earrings shaped like tiny handcuffs. Snooks Hayes was, in fact, Lisa Lambert's aunt, and also the wife of the Falls City investigator who, on New Year's Eve, 1993, had gone with other officers to arrest John Lotter and Thomas Nissen. "I'm hateful," she told me. Lana Tisdel, she said, must have known something bad was going down, and she wouldn't go to the telephone. If she had telephoned Humboldt, "three people wouldn't be dead today." This attitude fanned considerable speculation, started by Nissen in one of his numerous conversations with authorities, that Lana Tisdel had gone to Humboldt with him and Lotter. Nissen subsequently withdrew the allegation, and it was not vigorously pursued in testimony.

Because of the ill-concealed animosity, Lana and Leslie Tisdel seemed more comfortable sitting among the Lotter and Nissen relatives when they were in the courtroom. There was a washed-out, Mia Farrow quality to Lana Tisdel's looks; she was toothpick-thin, with long strawberry-blond hair hanging halfway down her back, and she had a constant nervous tic between her nose and upper lip. The first time I saw her, at a preliminary hearing in 1994, she was perfectly made up, not a strand of hair out of place; there were television cameras outside the courthouse, and it seemed as if she had dressed to be discovered—that the murder coverage offered her a last best chance for a ticket out of Falls City.

Leslie Tisdel was something else again—heavy, brash, contentious, trying to make eye contact with John Lotter, who without looking around gave friends and family in the courtroom a kind of over-the-head, backhand wave. He was stooped and skinny, his hair gathered into a ponytail held by a rubber band, and he looked not unlike Charles Manson. At the conclusion of an early hearing, Leslie Tisdel tried to speak to Lotter, but she was herded out of the courtroom by Sheriff Laux, who was running for reëlection. "He told me to get out of there real snotty-like," Leslie loudly complained in the elevator. "He didn't have to approach me and be all hateful. He ain't going to get my vote."

It was this self-absorption that made the Tisdels such a bewildering element in the case. A reporter for one of Nebraska's larger papers told me of introducing himself to Leslie Tisdel and asking her what her fight with Phillip DeVine was about. "And she said she was taking a bath," he said. She told him, "Phillip came into the bathroom and he wanted it now. I said, 'No way,' and besides, I was on the rag." The Tisdel sisters were best described by Barbara Jackson, the cartoonist and editorial writer for the Pawnee *Republican*, the weekly newspaper in Pawnee City, population 1,156. She is married to a family practitioner and, as a newspaper woman and doctor's wife, has seen or heard about most of the bad shit that can go down in a small town. "The Tisdels are like paper boats," Barbara Jackson said one day. "They've got no rudders—they just float through life any which way."

NISSEN was convicted in March, 1995, with his sentencing—to either death or life imprisonment—delayed pending his testimony against Lotter. By the time Lotter's trial began, in mid-May, Lana Tisdel looked feral and haggard, "like an animal run to ground," Barbara Jackson said. The continued speculation that she might be placed by Nissen in the Crown Victoria on its run to Humboldt and back seemed to have taken a toll on her. Lana had a new boyfriend, a construction worker with three children and a vasectomy.

Lotter seemed detached throughout the trial; the only time he appeared animated was the day his father came to court, and he showed him his leg irons. The Brandons were in the courtroom every day, and JoAnn Brandon showed photographs of Tammy's daughter Baileigh to anyone who asked. "The light of my life," JoAnn said. "She looks just like Teena." As always, the Lamberts sat quietly by themselves. There was a new regular in the courtroom, Donna Lotter, John's mother, a slightly overweight gray-haired woman in a nondescript raspberry sweater. The mother of five children, Donna Lotter held three jobs (nurse's aide, waitress, and clerk at the Hinky Dinky supermarket) in a vain effort to keep her family together. Donna Lotter sat directly behind John in court, with one or both of her daughters, and occasionally she would whisper bits of local gossip to him across the bar. Snooks Hayes was one of Donna Lotter's co-workers at the Hinky Dinky. What had happened in Humboldt, Snooks told Donna Lotter, was a tragedy that did not involve them and should not affect their relationship.

This view, instinctive and protective, did in fact prevail. During a recess before final summations in the Lotter trial, I sat in the almost empty courtroom going over my notes. When I looked around, I saw three middle-aged women talking quietly in the back two rows. The three were Virginia (Ginny) Tisdel, Lana and Leslie Tisdel's aunt, wearing a swanky sweat jacket; Anna Mae Lambert; and, leaning back toward them from the next row forward, Donna Lotter. They appeared to be talking about children and grandchildren—Mrs. Tisdel about Lana as a child, Mrs. Lambert about Tanner, Mrs. Lotter about what I did not try to discover. It seemed a perfect tableau vivant of small-town life, a moment in which three women—the mother of the accused, the mother of a victim, and the aunt of the beauty whose restless eye had set the story in motion—acted as if there were no freight between them. They all knew each other, and, whatever their private feelings, there was a sense of immense shared sorrow.

I think it was the saddest sight I have ever seen.

14.

"IF you can't get laid in Falls City, you have a serious problem," Thomas Nissen wrote me from the Lincoln Correctional Center in the summer of 1995. To clear up any misunderstanding he thought I might have about his attitude toward Teena Brandon's sexual deception, he said in another letter, "I hate, and am totally against homosexuality between men. Between men is sick. Between women, it's such a show of love. I think it's cool." After O. J. Simpson's acquittal, Nissen mused, "One lucky rich nig—well, best not use that word." And about Falls City: "Lots of alcohol and seldom a shortage of drugs. Most of the time the county jail is full. Not much for the younger race to do but drink, drive, and dodge the boys in blue. Lots of unmarried moms and kids. There is very little work to be found. Even when there is work, it doesn't last for long. . . . Good things do come out of Richardson Co. If I ever hear of one, I'll be sure to tell you! That was a joke."

In one of my letters, I asked Nissen if he ever contemplated the element of chance that had put five such disparate people together in the Humboldt farmhouse the night of the murders. Nissen replied immediately. "A million ifs," he wrote. "What if I had never went to the bar in November and met the Tisdels. What if I had just simply been faithful to my wife, or not drank, or not allowed Brandon to live in my home, or bailed him out of jail, or liked him, or not even cared. Had I not been fucking other women, I would never have met Lotter when I did. After all, Rhonda McKenzie would have not been staying at my home had I not left Kandi alone for so many damn lonely nights. What if Brandon had been honest, or told everyone the truth when push came to shove. What if on Dec. 23, Brandon had told me, Tom, I'm really a girl and please take me home because I think I may get hurt. What if Brandon would have ran when the car got stuck on the late night of the 24 of December. He had the chance. What if I had recked the car like I thought of doing on the way to Lisa's home, or what if there had been a gun in Lisa's house, or what if Phil had not got into a fight with Leslie, or Missy been awake when I was at Lana's home on the early hours of the 31st, or if Brandon had been put in jail when we took him to court in Lincoln, or I had been busted on a dirty U.A. [urinalysis] while on parole, or if I had listened to Kandi when she told me not to have nothing to do with Lana, if I had killed myself, or if the gun had never been fixed, or if I had simply said, no. This list could go on and on. Yes Sir, fate can be a motherfucker."

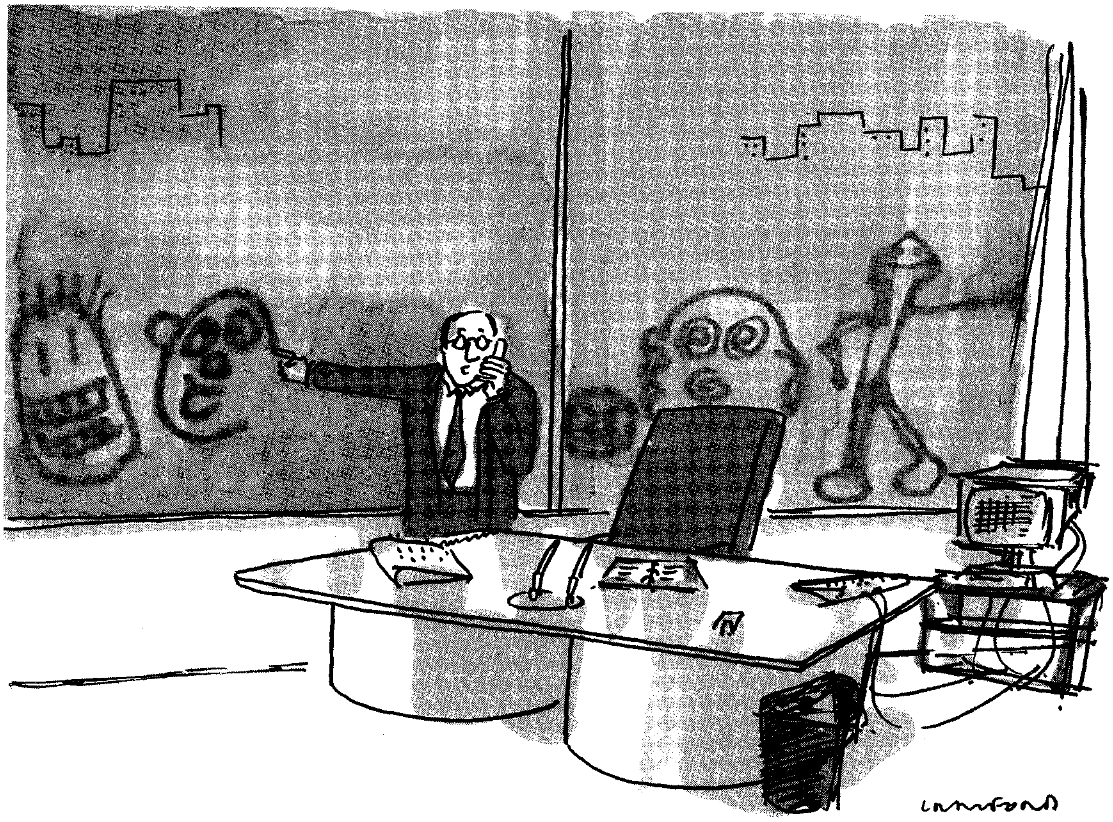
15.

EARLY in the summer of 1996, I drove up the road leading to the secluded farmhouse where Teena Brandon, Lisa Lambert, and Phillip DeVine had been murdered two and a half years before. I did not expect the house to be occupied, but scattered on the postage-stamp lawn were two tricycles, a bicycle, and a new doghouse. Unable to think what I might say to whatever strangers were living there, I turned my car around and drove back out to the main road.

When I arrived in Falls City, the first person I saw was Judge Robert Finn, having lunch at the Stephenson Hotel. A former F.B.I. agent, Finn looks like a movie version of a judge—tall, with snow-white hair, and a calm detachment that I never saw him lose during the time he presided over the Nissen and the Lotter trials. We talked about the local lack of interest in the two cases, and in the social complexity of a small town, the gulf between the haves and the have-nots. If I wanted to see how this applied in real life, he said, I should drop by his courtroom that afternoon, where he would be hearing motions. "You keep seeing the same faces," he said. "I'm into third-generation domestic abuse and restraining orders." What the judge meant was that women were seeking restraining orders against abusive husbands and lovers whose fathers and grandfathers had appeared before him on the same charges in the course of his sixteen years on the bench.

The subtext that Judge Finn and I were dancing around, of course, was the matter of class, and the way in which the Humboldt murders had revealed a drifting and woefully underequipped stratum of southeastern Nebraskans distinctly at odds with the place's official view of itself. This was the stratum so noticeably on display, in the months after the murders and during the subsequent trials, on the mud-wrestling that passes for daytime and tabloid television. The Humboldt murders had everything daytime television craves—sex, violence, race, deviant behavior, and gender bending. Maury Povich calling, Montel Williams and "Inside Edition," too.

Before the trials began, Povich nabbed the Tisdels, mother and daughters, John Lotter's sister Michelle, and two of Brandon's old Lincoln girlfriends, Lindsay and Daphne. All their responses seemed programmed by watching too many shows like Povich's. "I thought Brandon was the best person I could have ever met in my whole life," Daphne said, and Lindsay said, "If a guy would look at me, he'd kiss me because he was really jealous. . . . He didn't want nobody looking at me." Linda Gutierres's memories had taken on a more benign gloss since she threw Teena Brandon out of her house and told Nissen and Lotter where she was staying on the night of the murders. "I liked him a lot," she said. "He was a very nice person." Lana Tisdel answered mostly in monosyllables: "Yeah . . . uh-huh . . . yes." Only Leslie Tisdel seemed determined to make the most of her five minutes of fame, opting for an audience-pleasing, if gruesome, particularity: "Lisa Lambert got shot in the right eye, the back of her head. Brandon got stabbed. Pierced her liver. She got a shot like in the upper chin part. She got shot in the side of her head. Phillip got shot in the neck, and he got shot in the side of the head."



"Do you mean am I busy busy?"

I watched a videotape of Donna Lotter on "Montel," and was struck by how mortified she seemed. At some point, it was if she realized that she was only cannon fodder. Her sole claim to the audience's attention was that she was the mother of a murderer, and therefore a target of opportunity both for Montel Williams's opprobrium and for his synthetic sympathy. The Brandons were also on that episode of "Montel," and, at Williams's urging, JoAnn Brandon agreed that she and Tammy felt no animosity toward Donna, that she was not responsible for what her son had done.

"Closure" was now the dominant theme with the Brandons, and retribution as well, a reason for living. About Nissen, JoAnn Brandon said, "Every time he goes up for parole, I'll be there to make sure he doesn't get it." With John Lotter, who still maintains his innocence, she was looking forward to years of appeals, and after each stay of execution her opinions would be sought, a sound bite for the local newscasts. "I feel sorry for his family," JoAnn Brandon said of Lotter, "but I hope he burns in hell." I expect that JoAnn Brandon will be a witness at the Nebraska State Penitentiary when John Lotter's appeals are exhausted, ten years or more in the future, and his execution is finally scheduled. She will be a woman deep in middle age, her grandchildren teen-agers, and I wonder if, when the state has exacted its punishment, she will feel a void.

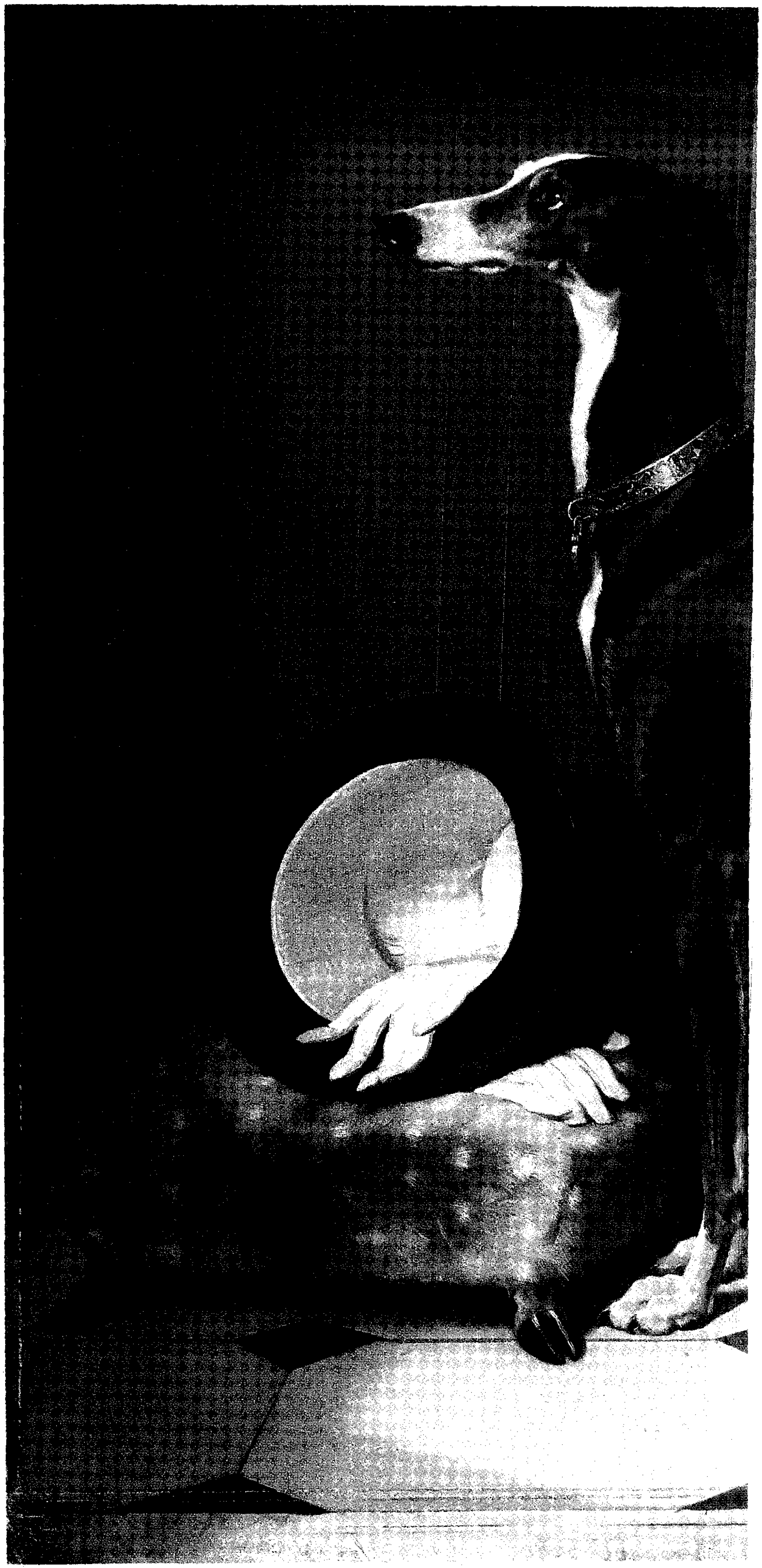
As it happened, there was an execution scheduled at the state penitentiary in Lincoln on my last night in Nebraska. The condemned prisoner—a pedophile former Air Force enlisted man who had murdered two adolescent boys in 1983—had been on death row for twelve years. I stood outside the prison that afternoon, checked the name of the priest who would give the accused Communion and say the last Mass that he would hear, wrote down the menu of the last meal he ordered, counted the number of chemical toilets available to the press and to the pro- and anti-capital-punishment protesters, and jotted down their rhetoric. I thought it was a scene that JoAnn Brandon would one day pass through on her way into the prison for the final closure. Late that afternoon, however, the United States Supreme Court issued a stay of execution; the protesters melted away, and the television crews did their live feeds, then got into their satellite trucks and drove off.

The pedophile murderer was finally executed three weeks later, only the second person to be executed in Nebraska since 1959. On the day of the execution, John Lotter's photograph appeared in the Omaha *World-Herald* as one of the eleven men on Nebraska's death row. Lotter has said that if a movie is ever made about his case he would be happy to be played by the actor Christian Slater.

On December 31, 1996, three years to the day after the Humboldt murders, I received a letter from Thomas Nissen wishing me a happy new year. He said that tensions between rival gangs had forced a five-day lockdown at the prison, and also that he had fallen in love with a Michigan woman whom he hoped to marry next fall. "Did you hear that I may receive a new trial?" he wrote. "I'm not sure how I feel about that." ♦

TOP HAT AND TAIL

It has been said that the Victorians loved their animals more than their children. How else to explain the enormous success of Sir Edwin Landseer (1802-73), whose sentimentalizing portraits of upper-class dogs and other élite quadrupeds made him the most popular British painter of his time? Almost forgotten today, he resurfaces in a major survey of Victorian painting which opens next month at the National Gallery, in Washington. Landseer could never resist loading his animals with human traits. In "Eos, a Favorite Greyhound, the Property of H.R.H. Prince Albert," the royal hound looks ready to don his top hat and white gloves and head for Covent Garden. His soulful eyes evoke the Victorian virtues—loyalty, probity, chaste ardor, elevated thoughts. The painting is from the collection of that preëminent post-Victorian Queen Elizabeth II.



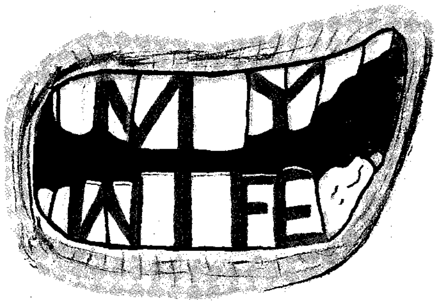
THE ROYAL COLLECTION ©1997. HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II, COURTESY THE NATIONAL GALLERY

FICTION

LINDA'S DADDY'S LOADED

And her husband's not.

BY MATTHEW KLAM



called me at work to say she saw our neighbor in his garden. She was standing in our garden—our house is way up on a hill, you don't realize how high it is until you're up here—and she could see him down there in his fenced-in yard, in shorts and a baseball hat, reading the newspaper. A woman came out of the house in a towel, Linda said, and she took it off and spread it on the ground and started doing exercises on it. Linda said it was weird. The woman wore a bikini, and every once in a while the man looked over at her and said something. He kept lifting one leg, she said, crossing it over the other. The woman sat up and brushed her hair and took off her top, rubbing lotion on her shoulders, and the man got up and lay down next to her and they started making out.

It was hard to see, Linda said, but she could imagine it. I pictured her in the flower bed, with her gloves on and her gardening shirt and her straw hat and sunglasses and her special knee pads, with the little shovel, and the void look of half recognizing something happening outside her that she wanted or that had somehow grabbed her. And so there she was, sucked in, and she said to herself, What should I do? Should I stop looking? Should I call Mike at work? And then she thought, What if they stay there all day? Then, Linda said, the man rolled off the woman and you could hear them both laughing. She said, "Do you think I should invite them over?"

"Is that why you called me?"

She said, "Why don't we ever do that?"

I didn't know. Linda'd been "retired" for a year. Not working had done this to her. I don't know what you'd call it, but here was the result. I said, "I gotta go." It had been hectic times like you sometimes have at an ad agency, where everybody's going nuts and you rush and rush and the guy you need stays at lunch for three hours. While I was waiting for him to come back I cut off the chewed-up end of my pen cap with a toenail clipper and a piece flew into my eye. It still hurt.

Linda said, "How would you feel if your father was coming to visit us?"

"I don't know." I rubbed my eye. I heard her breathing on the other end. I said, "Is somebody coming to visit us?" She said yes. "Who?"

"My father." She read me a letter that said he'd be at a wedding near us and thought it would be good to come see our new house. She'd called him back and told him O.K. He'd be here late Saturday. In the letter it said he was bringing "the maid."

She said, "Oh, why is he coming?"

We were living this quiet little life. We had this beautiful house that we built out of her "inheritance." It's not an inheritance—an inheritance is money from a dead person. This was from him. And we didn't "build" the house; we paid somebody else and they built it. It's up there, out of the way of danger, on the edge of a valley of rolling green farms outside Philadelphia. It was everything we'd ever wanted, and we acted happy there. I called her Bunky, she called me Cheese.

"Cheese," she said. "I hate my father."

We had a nice yard, a beautiful pool, sliding glass doors leading out to a patio, metal lawn chairs with pillows, a dog, a special electric fence to keep the dog from running away, a thing on his collar to shock him if he tried, track lighting in the kitchen, a marble pastry block. We had a thing to dry the lettuce after you wash it. We had a bug-electrocuting mosquito light. We had a Chevy Tahoe Blazer, and a little B.M.W. We had money, her money. We didn't have to worry about what we bought. We bought the woods behind the house and ran back there with the dog and came home with twigs and leaves stuck to us. We met a great group of people when we moved in, all our neighbors who'd built nice houses out here like ours—the men worked in the city and the women were all psychologists. We had them over and they had us over, talking and drinking French red wine till two in the morning—it was a fucking blast, discussing famous celebrities roughly our age over roasted chicken, everything great.

The second I met Linda, I knew she was the one. We were so cool together. Everything was easy. She was way better-looking than anyone I'd ever dated before. We'd sit around all night watching TV, making out, eating pizza in our underwear. It was heaven, playing together like children, touching, feeling, learning all the hidden stuff (I hate sports, she smoked PCP in high school). I bought her cheap little presents every day on my way home from work. She made my balls go slack when she looked at me. Sometimes she looked at me so hard her eyes crossed. It was beautiful. We decided to get married, and then she told me she was rich, and that was terrific. We bought the land and built the house and moved out here.

What were we doing? I gave her this dog, on our first anniversary, and we'd sit on the floor together and talk to it, petting its fur—it was small and soft then. Linda's voice would grow quiet and I'd feel calm, and she'd call it funny names and kiss it; or kiss me, or I'd rub Linda's soft golden forearm and lean over and kiss the back of her silky head, the beautiful smell of shampoo surrounding her, and I could feel the bitterness drain out of me. "Don't think," I'd say to myself.

FILIP PAGOWSKI

"It's cool." We had a good life style. I wanted to enjoy it. The dog was a puppy when we got him, a furry black bundle, but now he was an enormous, shedding mutt; the muscles bulged in a ring around his concrete head as he tore up tennis balls in his jaws and swallowed the pieces. It was my job to walk him at night, and I'd stand in the driveway and watch him piss, and see if he had shit where I had to walk. I'd look at the sky and get lonely. I'd go around shutting off the lights in our big, empty house. That feeling got me every night for at least a second. I'd walk upstairs and hug Linda and hold on, and it took all my troubles away.

FRIDAY after work I went to the food store. Linda waxed the floor in the foyer. She vacuumed the carpets, barely able to talk, drained of energy, polishing the table from a lying position on the couch—a scared, pathetic mess. It was awful to watch. I felt sorry for her, and that night we went to bed at nine o'clock. She sat on the covers in a nightshirt with the front unbuttoned and her tits hanging out and put together her Scrabble set and asked me to play. She wanted to organize her brain into letters—"letters that make words"—so her mind could make sense, so she could think, so she could sleep. She said, "I think I'm worried."

"It'll be fine," I said. "Don't think about it."

"Turn up the thermostat," she said. "Turn on the air-conditioner. Not the air-conditioner. Just the air, just the fan." She didn't have her contacts in and she was talking to the wall about two feet to my right, to a dark drape where I'd been standing a few seconds before.

I said, "I'm looking for the switch."

"I like the noise it makes. It calms me, it soothes me, it reminds me of summer and puts me to sleep."

"I'm over here," I said.

"I like the smell."

"All right," I said. "Jesus fucking Christ. Point the light over here so I can see."

I held her and kissed her and told her not to worry—I hated her father, too. I hated my own father more. He was a dickhead. These fathers left a lot to be desired. Linda's face had broken out mysteriously that afternoon, and it was bumpy to the touch, like a rhinoceros. Her breath smelled like hot liverwurst, and while we slept she kept heaving the covers off us onto the floor; her skin was about a million degrees.

SATURDAY morning we were ready. The father wouldn't be here till later, so when there was nothing else to do we got dressed and sat in the living room and stared at each other. Every few minutes the dog walked through. I heard his claws tapping on the kitchen's tile floor, his slobbering sounds, his collar clanging into the food bowl a hundred thousand times.

They pulled in to our driveway at four in the afternoon. The sun was still shining. We stood at the open front door. Her father got out of the car first. He smiled, and waited as the maid came from around the other side to join him. I'd met him once a long time ago, at a diner in Connecticut; we'd shaken hands and had coffee, a month before our wedding, which he wasn't invited to attend. Here again was Phil's famous face—Phil Shore, the guy from the television-network evening news—smiling and pointing at his daughter and me.

Everybody in the family hated him—he was "estranged," nobody talked to him anymore. They said he was selfish, that he'd cheated on his wife for twenty years—there was crazy stuff the mother accused him of, a secret family he had hidden in Denmark—but besides that there were real things, that had been proven. He cut off Linda's sister's college money—after a screaming fight in which Jeannine called him "Phil Donahue"—while he went on spending millions on himself, commuting to work every day in a helicopter. And then he dumped the wife. Once every six months, Linda would tell me he'd phoned, and that was it. I think I talk to my father the same amount, although we keep it down to that intentionally, to stay on good terms.

Linda's father was wearing gold sunglasses, and he had a ring of white hair that was fluffed up on the sides. He had on loafers and nice pants, a white shirt, and a black golf sweater. He was tan—it was part of his look. The woman with him had on a long gauzy sundress and sandals, and as she stepped from behind the car into the sunlight her body cut a perfect silhouette through the dress. She was tall and beautiful. She wasn't anybody's maid. She looked like a Dallas Cowboys cheerleader. He'd dumped Linda's mother for this woman. They held hands. She took off her sunglasses, and flipped her long brown hair and waved at us. I looked at my wife, whose skin rash was covered up by a dense orange powder. Phil put his hand out and we shook. Linda kissed her father. He introduced the woman—her name was Barbara—and when he spoke his voice was smooth and deep, with a familiar little crackle in it. It dropped and rose, and you found yourself staring at him—just like on television. "Nice to see you, Mike," he said. "The house and yard are lovely." That same careful presentation, the same painstaking delivery.

Linda said to Barbara, "Your hair is a gorgeous color." Barbara said to her, "You have such beautiful blue eyes."

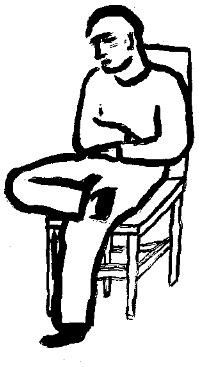
Linda coughed, trying to breathe, and smiled in that rash-makeup, and we went in and showed them the house. Through the bay windows in the living room you looked out on the whole valley; there were grain sheds and farmhouses, and on a road in the distance you could see a truck and a car moving slowly along like toys.

Barbara said, "This is amazing," and put her hand on Linda's father's shoulder and kissed him. She said, "We should do something like this," and he nodded, and Linda and I smiled. The father looked around. He had his hands in his pockets. The lenses of his glasses were fading inside the house.

After the divorce, Phil had given Linda and her sister each nine hundred and forty thousand dollars, and they received a smaller gift from him once a year. It was his success, his fame and money that gave us this house, the land, the cars, the furniture, all our accounts and portfolios and investments—we couldn't have this life on our own; on our own we couldn't have bought the handmade teak porch swing—and he'd never even seen a picture of the place. I wanted to thank him for it—"Thank you for the house, thank you for the cars"—but I didn't.

Barbara told us about the wedding they'd been to, all the fancy dresses, tons of food, and Phil yawned. Linda asked if they even wanted any dinner that night. We said we'd get a pizza, and we carried their bags inside and put them in the guest room, and they went in and closed the door.

At six we had drinks on the patio. Barbara and Linda drank wine, and I made vodka tonics for Linda's father and me and put some jazz on the stereo, and the four of us sat down to enjoy the sunset. Phil said something into Linda's ear and went inside, and through the glass patio doors I saw him throw his drink into the kitchen sink. I went in there. He stood at the counter, picking up bottles of booze. He shook one and held it up to the light. I said, "Is your drink O.K.?" He said the vodka was cloudy. "This is it? This stuff is a hundred years old." Linda stood in the doorway with her finger in her mouth. I picked up a bottle of schnapps. He said, "You gotta be kidding me." He blew the dust off a label. Linda went back out and slid the door shut behind her. There were unopened bottles in the cabinet below, and I saw some other type of vodka and grabbed it. I showed it to him. His eyes were bulging out of his head. His teeth were capped. They looked like Chiclets. He took the bottle out of my hand. He made himself a new drink and cut another piece of lime and went back outside. I followed him. I mixed the next round exactly the way he had; he seemed happy with it, and in a little while he was stoned.



It got cool as the sun went down. We put on sweaters. Nobody had anything to say. Barbara smiled at us, bobbing her foot to the music. She asked Linda the name of the man who'd designed the house. Linda yawned with her mouth open. I patted the dog's head. At seven o'clock, the pizza guy drove down the driveway.

Phil followed me out front, and before I could get my wallet out he paid the guy. Then I stood there holding the pizzas while he got his briefcase out of the car. He said, "Hey, I like you, Mike. I'm glad to see you with her." I felt a little sweat pop out. It was the most he'd ever said to me. "Thank you," I said. I tried to act a little more laid-back; I asked him if he still liked to play golf—I couldn't remember. He said, "She was such a slut in high school." He passed me some folders to carry. "It was disgusting," he said, "just the numbers alone," and slammed the car door. Then the dog came loping out of the dark—it loves anyone getting in or out of a car—and ran right between his legs. He raised his briefcase and said, "Get away!" Our dog isn't really trained, and when he smelled the pizza he came after me, but not before he'd left a big glob of spit on Phil's pants. Phil said, "I don't believe it," and wiped his pants and stomped inside.

We ate, everybody's eyes on the table. Barbara asked Linda "Do you have any Parmesan?" and Linda exploded out of her chair and over to the kitchen and came back holding the cheese grater in front of her. Phil was quiet. He seemed perfectly happy to stare at his plate. I asked him about celebrities he'd interviewed; he belched into his fist and sat up, and told us a story about leaving Russia in the sixties with a planeload of journalists—"Just before they locked me in the studio," he said. "Ha ha"—he was acting a little more alive. He said they were forced to turn the plane back in midair, and Russian soldiers escorted a guy off who was from one of the Eastern European newspapers and shot him.

I was trying to remember how I knew this story. He said, "That Czech gentleman turned up dead." That was it. This was, word for word, the identical story he told the other time I met him, in that diner. Phil finished his beer, hunched over in his chair. He didn't look the way he looked on TV. He looked old. I'm sure he was tired. His eyes were all red. But there were other, subtle differences. I watched him swallow. Up close, he was mostly ears and sagging eyelids.

I nodded along to the end of the story. He said, "When we got home from that one, we got out the vodka and drank." Déjà vu that line, too. I stood up and got the vodka bottle from the kitchen and slammed it down in front of him. Everybody laughed. I wondered if he'd ever been on that plane in the first place. I pictured him lying on the couch in his office, masturbating to an image of himself dressed in a Russian Army uniform, himself dressed as the airplane pilot, himself getting shot as the Czech guy. I thought how boring it must've been for his daughters to grow up listening to this egomaniac tell the same stupid stories every night—even though he didn't, because he was never around. Across from me, Linda didn't seem to mind. She had a dim, unconscious half smile on her lips. He pulled at the pizza and dabbed his chin with his napkin, chewing slowly. We finished, finally—yahoo!—and Linda asked who wanted coffee, and he wiped his mouth with the napkin and folded it and dropped it on the floor, and said he was tired and told everybody good night and went to the guest room.

In bed that night I kissed Linda on her head. I said, "It's going O.K., I think." She was lying on her side, not facing me. There was all this tension between us. "You're doing great," I said. She nodded. I said, "I'm proud of you."

"Uh-huh."

"Your dad's terrific."

"He's a one-trick pony," she said.

"I love you."

She looked at me. "What a charmboat," she said, and turned back and went to sleep.

With no rash on her face, she's beautiful. Her face is perfect, no kidding. And I'm not bragging: I think she's damaged because of it. She can be a pain in the ass. She doesn't know who to trust, so she has to trust me, but if you took an X-ray of the inside of her soul you'd see loose pieces, with unmatched edges, floating around inside her. Beautiful women are a pain in the ass. In some ways, they're worse off than ugly women—even ugly men, even ladies with full beards—because under their laser scrutiny everybody is horrible and gross.

Linda's skin is powdery warm brown silk. Picture gold. Her chin is pointed. Her cheekbones are sloped. She has blue eyes like a plastic doll's—circular, sparkling clear-glass marbles—and long eyelashes, a wide mouth, soft lips, and long thick brown hair. She has a battery of predictable human expressions. She's talked about becoming a schoolteacher, or a psychologist, like the neighbors on either side of us, women who do something, who found a skill. I wish she'd do that. I wish she would. She took time off from her old job—she hated clothing sales, driving to malls, selling Calvin Klein—and then talked herself into retiring forever, but she can't stay retired forever.

You know that pain you feel when you see an incredibly beautiful face: you look at her and you want to know what she's thinking and you're sitting there guessing and you don't even come close? You have to kiss her and hold her sweet face in your hands and shove her down somewhere and get on top of her and make her all yours—even when she *is* yours? Even when she loves you, too? Even when she's your wife and she gave you everything she had? I look at her and I feel that pain. If I had it to do again, I'd marry a woman who didn't have such good luck, who was born with a face like a horse, a face like a Russian carrot farmer, with whiskers, who maybe blossomed later in life, someone who was forced to be a human being before giving up, or a fat one, even, so she doesn't snap at you.

SUNDAY morning, I drove in to work with the excuse of grabbing a disk, and spent the day there, editing videotape on the computer. When I came home, the cars were sitting in the driveway exactly where I'd left them. I found Linda kneeling in the garden, with Barbara lying on a chaise in the sun nearby, looking into the sky with my binoculars. I asked where the father was. They said he was in the guest room on the phone. I went over to Linda and gave her a kiss. It made a hollow, sucking noise. She looked at me, panicked.

I said, "Relax."

She said, "I know."

Her skin looked worse. It was shiny from ointment. She stared ahead, her neck veins bulging. "He ate all the ice today," she said.

I said, "That's O.K."

She said, "He chomps it," and moved her jaws up and down, showing me. She was looking to me for some kind of recognition.

I said, "The refrigerator makes more automatically." Linda sighed, panting. She said, "I feel like I'm five years old again."

I said, "You're O.K. It's fine."

She said, "I want to run away," and I said, "Not without me you're not," and she said, "We can't go anywhere. We live here."

I said, "I know."

She went inside to get dinner ready. Barbara followed her.

I put on my trunks, went outside, and swam back and forth in the pool until I could feel the pressure of my goggles forcing my eyeballs out of their sockets. I got out and sat in a chair for a few minutes, leaning hard into the backrest, trying to get the plastic tubes of the chair to explode. Then I just looked out, unwinding, glad to be home. I watched the air above the valley, following a bird as it glided around catching pockets of air down there, as it made itself rigid and floated. I wanted to see these people get in their car and leave. I listened to the two women's high voices through the window in the kitchen and tried to make out what they were saying. I stood up and popped the pool water out of my ear and went inside.

The father was still not out of his room. It appeared that nothing had happened here today among this group, except worse hives. Phil and Barbara were leaving first thing Tuesday—he had to interview King Hussein in a hospital in New Jersey, and I guess this was their layover. I wondered if Phil had some other reason for the visit. What was it? Why backtrack lost causes? Why do it half-assed? Let it go. Send an E-mail.

Linda stood over the stove, with that rash-face. She was trying not to freak, and currently this stage was holding. I would've liked to be in Bermuda, with a hash pipe surgically attached to my lips, but I was trying, too. Even the dog was trying, smiling at everybody and wagging his tail, not shitting his monuments in the driveway for me to hurdle. We were trying to be an upbeat household. Linda painted the chicken parts, humming loudly. Barbara chopped the salad. She asked if I was hungry. I said I was starving.

The father came out, and we mixed drinks and carried them into the living room and turned on the news. He wore the same black sweater, with a clean, pressed teal-blue golf shirt underneath. He praised the TV anchorman, his week-

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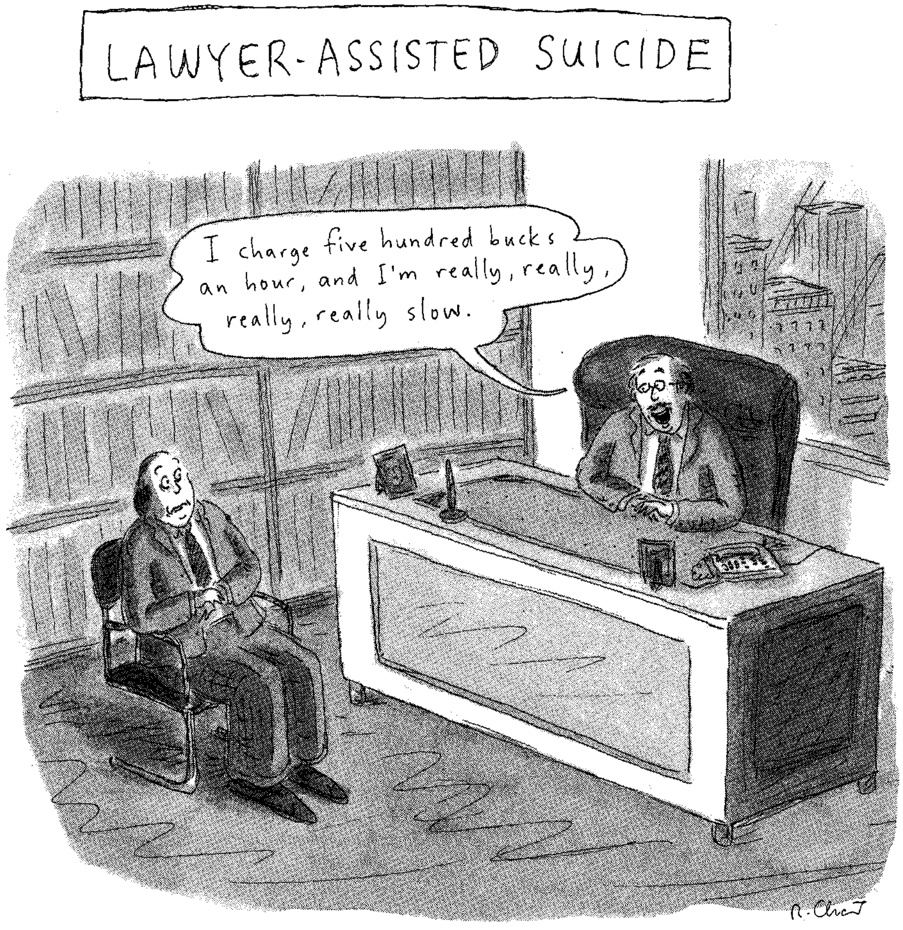
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end sub. "A black guy like him can take it as far as he wants," he said, and stared at the screen and kept his leg jiggling, even during commercials. I got us some peanuts and watched him watch the news. He yelled, "The Hague," when the anchor called it "The Hog," and he laughed and slapped the couch. "Pronunciation, mon frair!" he said, and switched off the show, relaxed and happy, when it ended a minute later. He asked me again exactly what I did for a living, and I told him that my agency did advertising and video production—no big deal, although we'd gotten a new client recently and the account was bigger than everything else combined.

He said, "That's exciting."

I said, "*Ucchh.* They want to shake everything up." He smiled. I said, "I hate that."

The client made some computer crap, I told him—I had no idea what. I just produced cable-TV commercials on video, cheap stuff. The other guys handled the business.

He put a big handful of peanuts into his mouth and leaned very close to me and chewed and breathed his bitter old peanut-and-vodka, coffee-stained breath in my face. "It's tremendous," he said. "The structure of business is changing forever."

I said, "Oh, yeah?"

He said, "Universal access to information on the Internet—that blows my mind." He tapped the side of his head. I stared at his Chiclets. He started talking about where my agency should bid for new business, like the defense industry.

I said, "Yeah, excellent, wow."

He said, "You gotta be aggressive."

I said, "That's right." He seemed psyched as hell. He grabbed the back of my neck and yanked it.

"I really like you, Mike," he said. He turned around and yelled to the women in the kitchen, "How's it going in there!" They both went, "Fine."

Linda once told me how he could go for days without sleep, how he napped on the floor of his office, how he screamed at his reporting staff so hard one time that he broke a blood vessel in his face and fainted and had to be carried out of the meeting by paramedics. But his news program had revolutionized the way networks reported information to us. He invented the informal patter that anchors you see today are using—he started that, he battled for it, he believed in it, and he won. He loved his job.

I asked if I could show him some videos I'd made, and handed him an award plaque I'd won a few years ago. He held it and looked at it. We watched some tape of a commercial for a computer distributor; I told him I'd wanted it to look like documentary footage.

He asked if I was interested in the media. I said yes. He said, "I could set something up."

I said, "Like what?"

"I'll call our Philly station," he said. "You'd probably start small—assembling footage from the network feed, that sort of thing," and I said, "Wow." The women called and said dinner was ready, and he put the award down on the couch.

At dinner there were candles on the table, baked chicken in orange sauce and raisins, vegetables with ginger and toasted black seeds on them, rice pilaf, a dense-looking, flat chocolate cake for dessert. Linda opened a bottle of wine. I raised my glass and said, "A toast." Everybody looked at me. I didn't mean I would *make* a toast. The bread Linda had just baked was steaming under the light. I started giggling in my high-pitched voice. She opened her mouth tightly and blanched. I was trying to think. Linda said, "What's a good toast?"

"To these two wonderful young people," Phil said. Barbara said "Hear! Hear!" and we clinked glasses and started passing around the food. Linda watched her father pick up his fork. He took a bite and said everything was perfect.

Barbara said, "When are you going to have kids?" Linda froze—we weren't ready for any kids—but before she could really freak Phil started telling us about the night Linda was born. "I had one foot out the door to Hanoi," he said. "But your mother . . ." He waved his hand at his lap to mean her stomach, the baby, something below the equator. "You almost came out in the driveway, you dope," he said.

Linda was blushing, watching him, wide-eyed. He said he was glad to see his firstborn, alive and healthy. He picked up his wineglass and said, "My secretary just had a baby. It's too small. You were a big, fat, beautiful baby, and you were always staring at me with your gorgeous eyes." He lifted Linda's hand and kissed it.

Linda started to cry. She got up and went to the bathroom and came back a minute later with the rice pot and another bottle of wine. Phil cut off the foil and opened it, and told us how he got beaten up by black kids when he was growing up poor in the Bronx in the thirties. "You ever been hit in the head with a baseball bat?" he asked me. I tried to think of something: when I was eleven, I fell down the stairs. "I guess not," I said. He told us about fighting in Korea; he mentioned his first night on national news, in 1962; he told us how he hung out with Cronkite; he described Bobby Kennedy's funeral procession down Fifth Avenue. He said hookers used to come through the newsroom to see the network bigshots; a lot of these guys were ruined by money, he said.

He poured more wine. "Linda," he said, "I discussed a deal with my lawyers." He paused. I didn't know what would come next; I pictured him throwing us out of this house, taking everything, boarding it up. "I made an investment that worked out the way I hoped it would, and I'm transferring the funds to you and Jeannine." We both said thanks. "It's done," he said. "It's a nice sum." Linda said, "Thank you, Daddy." He said, "Close to eight hundred thousand dollars apiece." I felt a wild pain shoot into my rectum, and I picked up my glass, staring at it as if there was some incredible thing dancing around in the wine. Linda said, "God, that's a lot of money." Her expression didn't change.

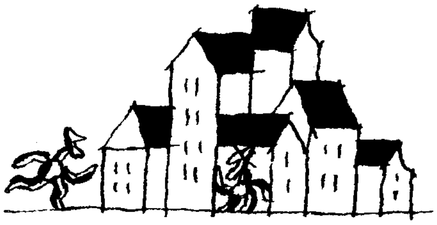
"I've spoken to your mother a number of times," he said. "I've seen her twice this year." He said he liked the way she had redecorated the old house. "We've made up," he said. "We're O.K. now. I don't know whether that matters to you or not." Linda shrugged her shoulders and smiled, and wiped her eyes with her napkin. "It's not the end of the world," he said.

"No," Linda said. Her voice broke.

It was midnight before we got up. We'd drunk four bottles of wine. Linda went and hugged her father, and he took her by the arm and led her outside to the patio. Barbara and I cleared off the table. She said, "He's a wonderful, wonderful man."

I said, "Yeah."

She said, "He treats me as good as he treats them." We were drunk as hell. We kept banging into each other. Outside, I saw Linda nodding to Phil as he spoke—it seemed like a huge relief. We ran hot water on the big pots and left them, and everybody went to bed.



Lying there, I could feel Linda's warm skin through her nightgown as she hugged me. My stomach was full from all that dinner and drinking, and I was tired and shitfaced and falling asleep, and I shoved her to the other side of the bed. When I opened my eyes again my wife was staring at me, shaking her head, smiling. I said, "You O.K.?" She nodded. She looked demented. I said, "I have to go to work in the morning." She got up—it shook the bed—and started brushing her hair out.

She said, "I love my daddy." She came over and sat on my leg, and pulled out matches and lit a candle. She kept moving and waking me up. She was like a big, hot cat next to me. She said, "I'm happy, Cheese."

When I woke up again, Linda was repeating my name, tapping on the skin of my upper lip with her index finger. I jumped. She said she wanted to go for a walk in the woods in the middle of the night. I blew out the candle. I told her to be quiet or I'd kill her; it was late, and tomorrow was going to be a heavy day at work. "Please, Bunky!" I said, but she begged me, so I got up and pulled the quilt off our bed and we stepped outside through the sliding glass doors and lay in the grass under our bedroom window. She pulled up my T-shirt and licked my stomach, and put her head down my pants and sucked on my completely flat penis for a while, until she gave up and laid her head on my gut. The mosquitoes were hovering over us, not touching our skin. It was cool out there. I held her face. We fell asleep and woke up later with dew on us. We crawled back inside, and I moved the alarm ahead from six to seven.

WHEN I got to work Monday, there was a message from Bob saying I should go to his office. He waved me in, sitting on the edge of his desk. Chip, our account supervisor, and Laura, the personnel manager, came in. Dean—Bob's partner and our lawyer—followed them with folders and sat on the couch.

Bob said, "The video department's a loser for the second year in a row. We're dumping it." Everybody was quiet.

"Oh God," I said.

He said, "The structure of business is

changing anyway." They were watching me. Chip jumped in and explained that, instead, I'd be overseeing "print-media services." He wanted me to write a brochure. I should talk about our mission, he said, and he thought I should mention technology and computers. He said, "Make it sales-y."

I said, "Do what?"

Chip said, "I need it by Thursday." He looked at Bob and back at me. "Don't worry. You'll be fine."

I said, "I'm a filmmaker."

Chip blinked. He said, "O.K."

I said, "Whatever," and walked out.

I went down the hall to my office. I shut the door, and five minutes later I walked back down the hall and leaned into Bob's doorway and said, "Are you gonna farm out video to somebody else?" He shrugged. He was on the phone. I said, "Am I that bad?" He covered up the mouthpiece and said, "Are you blind? I'm talking!" He's terrible with people. I packed my briefcase with papers and told Donna at the switchboard that I was sick and ran down to the garage and got my car.

I drove through the city. It was almost lunchtime. The lab was supposed to return film for two spots this afternoon so we could synch the sound, quarterly expense reports for my department were due at five o'clock, and we were having a barbecue that night with Linda's father and Barbara and six of our closest neighbors. I hadn't seen these people in weeks; I wanted everything to be cool. The scene at home was a little tricky now anyway. I was wearing a beautiful dark-green cashmere turtleneck sweater Linda had bought me and the sweat was pouring out of my armpits, rolling down my sides. I had the air-conditioner on full blast, sweating my ass off. I kept calling my voice mail at work and hanging up. I called home. Phil, of all people, answered.

"Can I talk to Linda?"

He said, "I'm on the phone."

I said, "Guess what? Is your offer still good from last night?"

Phil said, "I don't follow you. Look, I'm on another call. Just call back."

I drove around, staring at my car's reflection in passing store windows. I was an idiot for bringing up that stuff with Linda's father. I thought of everything he'd done—broadcasting live from wars, hosting Presidential debates, kneeling at the coffins of kings in photos on the covers of every newspaper in the world. Every time I saw a guy in a car on his cellular phone, I flipped out. I needed something immediately—a hug from my wife—and I jetted home.

THEY weren't there. I remembered they'd gone to pick up steaks for the barbecue that night, and I sat down to wait.

The dog came over and stood in front of me. He needed to be brushed. He had a cow's head and a long coat—he looked like a dusty, exploded buffalo rug. I said, "Come here, Rupis." He stared at me with his black eyes, and I thought of how stupid he was and yet, even so, was able to engender love in every living thing around him. I hugged him, and patted his head.

I let him out the patio door and went outside, across the lawn, and lay down in a quiet spot back in the woods. Rupis came around the long way and took a piss in the pine needles two feet from my head. I jumped up and yelled "Get out of here!" and kicked him in the ass, and he ran over behind a bush and stared at me. We were never mean to our dog, and he didn't know what I meant by it. But I didn't mean anything by it. I just kicked him.

We used to be a team, Linda and me. We shared an apartment for eight hundred bucks a month. She worked. She cooked spaghetti. No weekly food-delivery service, no personal trainer, no aromatherapy, no bond portfolio, no unborn-student college fund, no self-published recipe book, no invisible hair replacement, no eight thousand magazines flung at our door every month. I'd never been happy on the dole. I went over to the dog. He started to tiptoe away, and I grabbed him by the collar. "Stay, you fucker!" I said. He dropped to the ground in a submissive posture, and I leaned over and put my knee behind his head. His tongue went out, and he

SILVER GELATIN

He was watching, looking down at the park
from the 14th floor, waiting.
There is an hour, an afternoon light
well along into winter.

The angle she made with the pram
as she moved past the fountain
could not possibly be improved upon.
Her black hat,

the fur collar and padded shoulders—
a solitary young domestic,
caught through a net of griseous branches,
is getting the baby home for dinner,

home long before dark.
It is terribly cold.
She leans forward, pushing in haste.
At her own now extreme angle

and with the black coat and hat,
the pram underneath her,
the snow underfoot,
she looks, for all the world, from here,

a broken-off piece of Chinese ideogram
moving across the page.

—August Kleinzahler

hacked and choked and kept trying to back up. I put my hand through his collar and twisted it, cutting off everything. He yelped. "Go ahead, you crybaby," I said. He tried to lick my hand. I heard a door slam—they were back. With one final shove, I pushed myself off him and tried to break his neck, both. The dog jumped up, hacking and spitting, and took off into the woods.

When I got to the house, it was obvious that something was wrong: Barbara wouldn't talk to anyone, and Phil wouldn't look at her. Linda went past me into the kitchen with some bags. She didn't ask why, on a Monday at noon, I was home. I said, "What's going on?"

She said, "It started at breakfast." Phil had on a U.S. Navy baseball hat that said "USS NIMITZ CVN-68" stitched in gold. He circled the island counter in the kitchen and pushed the thing on the refrigerator door to fill his glass with ice cubes. He looked over into the living room at the back of Barbara's head and said, "Keep pouting, Princess. Go right ahead." She didn't move. "You're making a spectacle," he said. Barbara got up and picked up her sunglasses and closed the guest-room door behind her.

Linda looked at me. Her eyes were yellow. She said, "I can't cope anymore."

I said, "Oh, really? That's fucking unbelievable," and stared right back at her. I wanted to smack her face.

Phil went over and picked up the remote and turned on the TV. He stood there behind the couch staring at it. Linda walked past me. She said, "Daddy, turn that off."

She took the remote out of his hand. She said, "Christ." She stood there, staring at him. He removed his hat and rested it on his chest. His freckled bald head looked flat and smooth. He said, "What."

"Go talk to her," Linda said. "Now." She put the remote down on the back of the couch and pointed her finger over at the guest-bedroom door, sort of crookedly, with a bent finger, like an old witch's; her hand shook. "Go," she said, and continued the incantation, "because this is pathetic. You're not doing this here. You be nice."

He wet his lips and looked at her. Linda placed her hands on her hips. He said, "Yeah, yeah." He put the hat on again and slid it back and went over to the guest-bedroom door. He knocked and said, "Barbara," and went in.

Linda came over and stood in front of me. She was grinning like crazy. She said, "Did I do good?"

I said, "Yep."

"I took charge of my life."

I said, "Yeah."

She said, "What's wrong?" Her rash was glowing.

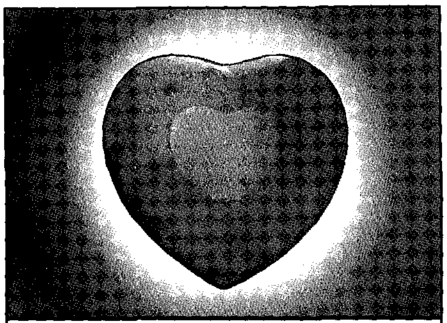
I said, "What do you think would happen if the world stopped letting you pant in their face?" She stopped smiling. I went outside to find the dog, to make up for choking him.

THE barbecue that night was a mellow affair. The neighbors all came and everybody was cool. They were thrilled and giddy to meet Linda's famous dad, and there was a ring of people around him all night, joking, laughing, asking his advice. Linda cooked steak and spun around in her new dress, grabbing her dad and showing him off, introducing her friends by their professions and showing them off, too. She looked great. She'd picked up some steroids from the doctor and her skin was better. We stayed away from each other. There was that jolly group, like, over there, and I was over here, talking to Barbara about her exercise routine. She played with the dog, who was rolling on his back, drooling, with this beautiful woman scratching his pink belly.

Phil had made the call to the affiliate. The deal was done. I said thanks. "You ready to rumble?" he said. I said yes. "You happy?" he said. I said yes. Absolutely.

I think of that mean thing I said to Linda—what was that all about? It's like there's a bird in my mouth, screeching. Maybe one day I'd open my mouth and it would come out like a flying hockey puck. I don't know, some nights I'd like to shoot out all the lights of this fucking house.

But hey, there's plenty of time for that. She's still there, my cute wife, whom I love: humming and singing to herself when there is tension in the house; or laughing, when all the doors are open, talking to her sister on the phone in the living room while I finish my dinner. We're gonna be happy more than not, Linda and me. We're gonna get this thing right. Even when it backfires, you don't necessarily hate someone for very long. ◆



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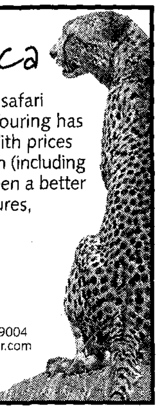

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BOOKS

THE ALARMIST

Robert Bork is very worried; Daniel Bell could help.

BY DAVID DENBY

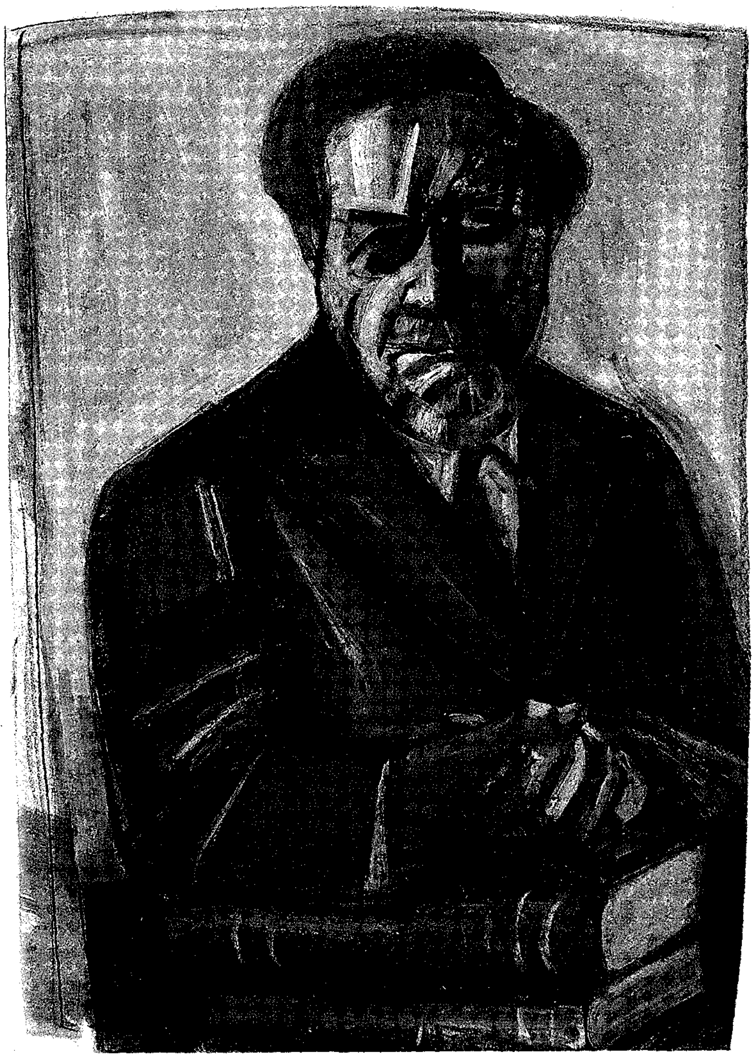
IN "Slouching Towards Gomorrah: Modern Liberalism and American Decline" (ReganBooks/HarperCollins; $25), Robert H. Bork complains that armies no longer sing. At one time, he says, armies sang together, a sign of discipline and spirit; but now armies make wisecracks. It's useless, I suppose, to point out that in the Second World War wisecracking G.I.s killed singing Germans by the thousands. No such plain-dirt evidence of efficiency is likely to matter, for even in Bork's passing remarks we are unmistakably in the presence of Moral Certainty. Robert H. Bork, the former United States Court of Appeals judge whose bid to join the Supreme Court in 1987 was famously and rancorously turned back, is angry about the degeneration that he sees everywhere in American life. He lines up the usual suspects and finds them guilty: the sixties and the counterculture; welfare and affirmative action; legalized abortion, popular culture, judicial "tyranny." But Bork goes much further: he questions the Declaration of Independence (that troublesome stuff about men "created equal" and "liberty"), and suggests a radical revision of the Constitution.

There is a small mystery here. Americans are supposed to loathe "negativism," yet "Slouching Towards Gomorrah" is a great success: there are now more than a quarter of a million copies in print. What makes the book especially curious is that Bork grinds seriousness and trivia together with a single pestle of wrath. He is outraged by the existence of phone psychics and parapsychologists, and he assures us that witchcraft is "undergoing an enormous revival in feminist circles as the antagonist of Christian faith." He comes out unequivocally against the mass-marketing, in the nineteen-sixties, of the transistor radio, which allowed children to listen to rebellion-inducing rock and roll rather than the honeyed music their parents were listening to in the living room; he is alarmed by the spectacle of men crying, which is a sign that "something has gone high and soft in the culture."

Bork's anguish is inspired by a paradox that he takes to be central to this period of American life: our commitment to equality keeps bumping violently into the natural order of things, which is hierarchical. He defends hierarchy in its many forms, and seemingly almost by instinct attacks anyone who questions the eternal necessity of triumph—the triumph of the proficient over the slow, the rich over the poor, men over women, whites over blacks, the West over everyone else. Since the second group in each of these matched pairs refuses to keep still, nearly all our current reality affronts Judge Bork.

The tone, if not the content, of Bork's book is familiar—its siege mentality, its dismayed sense of betrayal. Forty or so years ago, in the McCarthy period, when threats to "Americanism" were detected in such institutions as the Voice of America and the Girl Scouts, the far right exhibited a similar degree of wrathful contempt. In an anthology of essays first brought out as "The New American Right," in 1955, and revised as "The Radical Right," in 1964, the sociologist Daniel Bell, the book's editor and leading contributor, analyzed the fears of the McCarthyite and Birchite movements as a terror of modernity itself—an anxiety understandably felt by dispossessed groups (people living in small towns, retired military officers) in an increasingly urban and technocratic age.

Certainly much of what Bell says could be applied to today's militiamen, stranded in the postindustrial "information society" and repelled (again understandably) by the pagan media carnival. Amazingly, it could be applied to Bork as well. A man lodged firmly at the top of the social hierarchy, Bork writes as if he, too, had become one of the dispossessed. Bell, himself a cultural conservative, turns out to be an invaluable critic of conservative simplifications. His 1976 study, "The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism," which has just been reissued with a new afterword (Basic; $15),



Judge Bork: Nearly all of our current reality offends him.

emerges as a devastating critique of the intellectual habits of today's far right.

THE chief enemy for Bork is, of course, liberalism, or what he calls modern liberalism, by which he means two things: "radical egalitarianism (the equality of outcomes rather than of opportunities)" and "radical individualism (the drastic reduction of limits to personal gratification)." An example of the first would be the Supreme Court's extending the reach of the equal-protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to minorities. Radical egalitarianism, Bork argues, is pernicious even as an ideal: it strains for what is unattainable and undesirable; it causes the suppression of the talented and encourages the impudent claims of the unworthy. As for radical individualism, it has led to the denigration of religion and the collapse of morals. According to Bork, the product of these two aspects of liberalism at work is a civil society composed of warring minorities and interests, a society just barely held together by legalisms and by an increasingly brutalized and eroticized popular culture. Fascism, he says again and again, will be the likely outcome of our degeneration. In other words, we have to move to the right in order to forestall moving still further to the right.

In the face of this impending apocalypse, Bork seems to have retreated to a peculiar kind of utopia—a conceptual utopia in which life exists solely on the plane of morals. In Bork's America, good values and good ideas produce good behavior; bad values and bad ideas produce bad behavior. There are no awkward facts to stumble over, no ambiguities, unintended consequences, or unfortunate results caused by large, impersonal forces. If religion no longer restrains behavior the way it used to, that is because liberal élites have attacked religion and weakened it. Period. Bork's diatribe is also unembarrassed by such events as the postwar disappearance of millions of industrial jobs, or by the recent discovery by many workers at all levels that they cannot count on a single job, or even a single line of work, to last more than a few years. He has nothing to say about the gutting of downtown commercial and social centers in favor of roadside malls, and he touches only in passing on the way adolescent desire of virtually every kind is now shaped by pop culture and advertising. He cannot, or will not, see that such all but geologic disruptions in American life might produce some negative effect on sociability, religious attendance, child-rearing, and family structure, and hence on behavior and morals. For Bork, there is no economy or class structure: there is merely "culture," the realm in which liberalism destroys values and encourages wicked conduct.

Bork writes with a magisterial disregard for anything that contradicts his arguments. He dismisses racial discrimination as "economically irrational in any business where rivalry between firms exists" because the shrewd employer will always hire the best person for the job. There are no Texacos in Bork's America. Rather than moving from data to conclusions, he argues by fixed categories, with moral judgment built into the categories. In place of empiricism, a kind of moralized tautology takes over. Businessmen, we hear, are always rational, and therefore never racist. The judiciary, on the other hand, are members of the cultural élite, and though many appellate and Supreme Court judges were appointed by the Reagan and Bush Administrations, they, too, are members of the cultural élite; as a consequence, Bork says, the appellate courts and the Supreme Court have imposed a liberal social and cultural agenda on the nation.

For most of us, tautology is an occasional slip of logic, an attack of laziness. But for Bork tautology may be the mental habit that allows him to argue in the first place. In Bork's conceptual utopia, the world is relieved of its cumbersome bulk and drained of its daunting variety and intransigence, and the social commentator need never stray from the same small group of damning attitudes. What is most repellent about this book—its haughty certitude—may also account for its success. By joining moralism to the tautological mode, Bork speaks to those readers oppressed by the great national din, the sheer many-sidedness, the push-and-shove vitality, of the country's life. Our reality is not only intricate, it is tauntingly perverse and unfathomable: as everyone now knows, privileged white teen-agers in the suburbs are enormous consumers of the scabrous rap music that Bork hates so much. To understand that single piece of social data, you would have to delve into male sexuality, the eroticism of outlaw stances, the history of racism, the relation between the illusion of danger and the assurance of safety. It is much easier to blame it all on liberalism.

In his more plausible moments, Bork speaks of modern liberalism as a congeries of loosely held assumptions and hopes, a form of idealism that turns into a mal-

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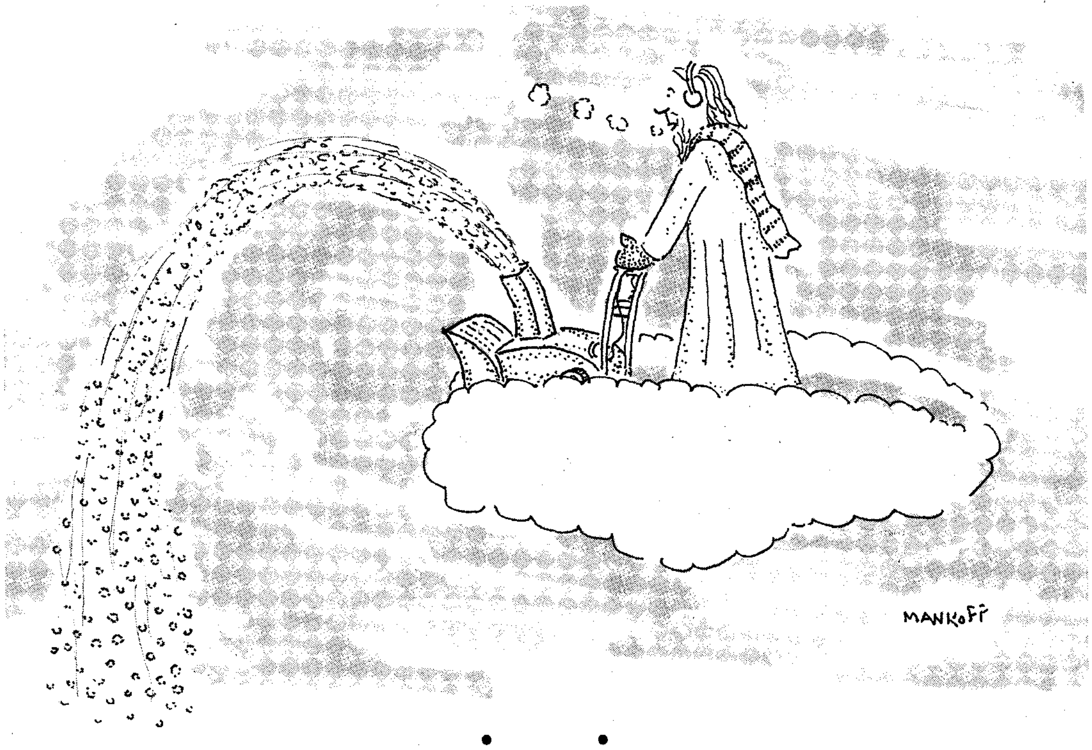

aise. Far more often, however, he seems to be describing a coherent system whose eager functionaries have taken control of the presses, courts, movie studios, and universities—a force like revolutionary Communism, only more widespread and far more dangerous. It is the Red Scare all over again, only this time the damage has already been done; the Girl Scouts have gone multicultural. For Bork, liberalism is synonymous with social power in America.

Readers across the political spectrum are bound to agree with some of Bork's complaints. No one can reasonably say that liberalism (however defined) is free of error, even disastrous error; or that values do not have some effect on behavior; or that the mass of radio, TV, movies, computer games, and so on does not alter habits and attitudes; or that our culture has not grown more crass in recent years. But one must also say that liberalism is not the framework in which we live. No single force controls American culture. In this country, liberalism is one mode of democratic capitalism; conservatism is another. In fact, if Bork had substituted "capitalism" every time he wrote "liberalism" his book would have made more sense.

DANIEL BELL has been obsessed with American capitalism his entire life. He began his intellectual career as a democratic socialist, but in 1965, after working for the anti-Communist *New Leader* and Henry Luce's *Fortune* and teaching sociology for years at Columbia, Bell founded, with Irving Kristol, *The Public Interest*, which quickly became the leading policy voice of neoconservatism. He later broke with Kristol when the magazine became, in his opinion, too much a voice of the Republican Party. He is, by temperament, a boldly independent figure—though Bell might say that capitalism, properly understood, almost requires contrarianism. In the 1978 foreword to the first paperback version of "The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism," Bell announced himself "a socialist in economics, a liberal in politics, and a conservative in culture." This triune division of belief was dictated by his analysis of American society, which, he insisted, could be comprehended only when divided into three disjunctive realms: the techno-economic, whose dominant ethos is functional rationality, or efficiency; the political, which is the arena of justice and power; and the cultural, a word Bell uses not in the anthropological sense but in the old-fashioned honorific sense—culture as the realm of religion and the arts, the arena of ritual and representation in which men and women try to make sense of their experience. He argues that each of these realms has its appropriate values, energies, and methods, and that from the clash among them arise the "contradictions" of capitalism.

Bell begins by evoking Max Weber's notion that "modern capitalism . . . was made possible by the asceticism sanctioned by Calvinist and early Protestant thought, which exalted work as a calling and encouraged savings by the delayed gratification of impulse." At one time, bourgeois culture united economy, character, and culture in a single frame. In time, the initial religious impulse and sanction faded, and acquisitiveness, always implicit in capitalism, became an end in itself. The moral identity enjoyed by bourgeois man was shattered. Capitalism itself shattered it. By the nineteen-twenties, the great increase in discretionary income produced by technological changes (the assembly line, home appliances, cheap transportation) made mass consumption not only feasible but irresistible. And once workers could buy things on the installment plan, or with a credit card, the ethos of deferred gratification collapsed and the reign of hedonism began. Ever since, an immense number of new desires have been created and satisfied, and the very habits that capitalism depends on—regularity, orderliness, loyalty to the enterprise—have been assaulted by the pleasures and freedoms that capitalism makes possible.

That is the first and largest contradiction. Bell, writing in 1978, speaks of corporate workers who are "straight" by day and "swingers" by night (ah, the seventies). Today it is perhaps more necessary to speak of the way that thousands of fatherless young men in the inner cities are mesmerized by such fetishes of the status-driven peer culture as Nike shoes—so completely mesmerized that they will kill to obtain them. The anarchic individualism that Bork so deplores—the boundless self operating in defiance of the community—is itself a personality formation created by the same system that makes us wealthy and gives us liberty. If conservatives could give up hurling accusations for an instant and confront such obvious elements in our reality, a dialogue with liberalism might produce something useful for morals—an agreement on how we might fight the domination of the marketplace and raise our children as citizens, not as habitual consumers; some notion of how we might reinstitute the useful emotion of shame at a time when shamelessness itself has become a commodity; and so on.

Bell acknowledges the ways in which the highbrow culture he loves has had a morally ambiguous effect on behavior. Modernism in its classic phase (from 1850 to 1930) despised the cramped character of bourgeois life and undertook, willy-nilly, a sustained attack on its temperament and mores. The cumulative effect of avant-garde explorations was to replace the classical artistic conventions with a new emphasis on simultaneity, immediacy, and sensation. Bell doesn't quite say how the influence on character is acted out, but the implication is that modernism tutors the self in its new demand for expression and pleasure. And here's the paradox: cultural modernism, though subversive of bourgeois mores, flourishes only in liberal capitalist states. (Socialism insists on austerity and repression.) Capitalism, in another "contradiction," breeds and shields the art that tries to destroy it. Eventually, of course, capitalism assimilates modernism, turning it into parody and pastiche, the furniture of corporate life style. Art is no longer a threat. It becomes an aspect of marketing, the routine shocks of MTV.

Bell's book remains fascinating, in part because his narrative of modernism and capitalism combines rising excitement and rising alarm: he is stirred by the audacities of Baudelaire, Schoenberg, and Jackson Pollock even as he is appalled by what modernism has done to bourgeois certitude. No less than Bork and William Bennett, Bell wants authority in culture; he wants standards and canons, he wants an ethical notion of the self, and he hopes for a revival of religion. He deplores the promiscuous and "antinomian" self making its endless, anxious choices in the consumerist bazaar. But at least he understands by what complex paths that poor figure arrived at its current faithless condition.

WHAT does Bork propose? He wants an activist agenda for reining in the courts. The problem, as he sees it, is this: "The judicial adoption of the tenets of modern liberalism has produced a crisis of legitimacy. Contrary to the plan of the American government, the Supreme Court has usurped the powers of the people and their elected representatives. We are no longer free to make our own fundamental moral and cultural decisions because the Court oversees all such matters, when and as it chooses." Bork offers, as a solution, a constitutional amendment "making any federal or state court decision subject to being overruled by a majority vote of each House of Congress." In other words, having failed to reach the Court himself, he now wants to emasculate it. His proposal would effectively end the balance of powers, thus scrapping the basis of the Constitution and introducing, initially, legislative dictatorship, and, in the long run, judicial anarchy.

This proposal is not only alarming; it seems contrary to Bork's own conservative agenda. What if the people decide to elect a liberal Congress? Would he be content with such a Congress overturning the decisions of the Rehnquist Court? Finally, the book is a weird mixture of authoritarianism and anarchic longings. At times Bork laments the decline in civility; at other times he flirts with the sort of civil disobedience now being actively considered by members of the Catholic far right.

In despair over America, Bork in his last chapter indulges the fantasy of retiring to "small islands of decency and civility" which would serve as the equivalent of the fifth-century Irish monasteries that kept Christianity and learning alive during the Dark Ages. But what, I wonder, would the modern anchorites do there—read Friedrich von Hayek over and over? Transcribe the broadcasts of Rush Limbaugh for the benefit of future generations? In any case, the dream lasts but a moment. Bork tells us, with a mighty sigh, that "modern liberals, today's barbarians, would impose their entertainments, their laws, their regulations, and their court decrees into whatever sanctuaries we may create." For Bork and his fellow-sufferers, there is no alternative: they must fight liberalism at every step. But should they change their minds and enter their monastery, I have a suggestion: they could ponder how such men as themselves might share power in America with women and minorities while strengthening the primacy of meritocratic ideals. Figuring this out would be a great challenge, I admit, but if the monks succeeded they would return in triumph to an America considerably less troubled by the rancor that so repels them now. ♦

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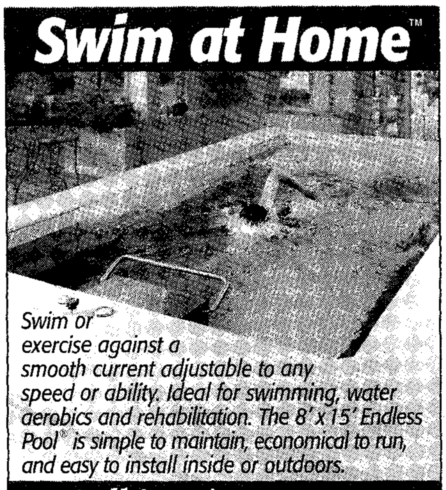

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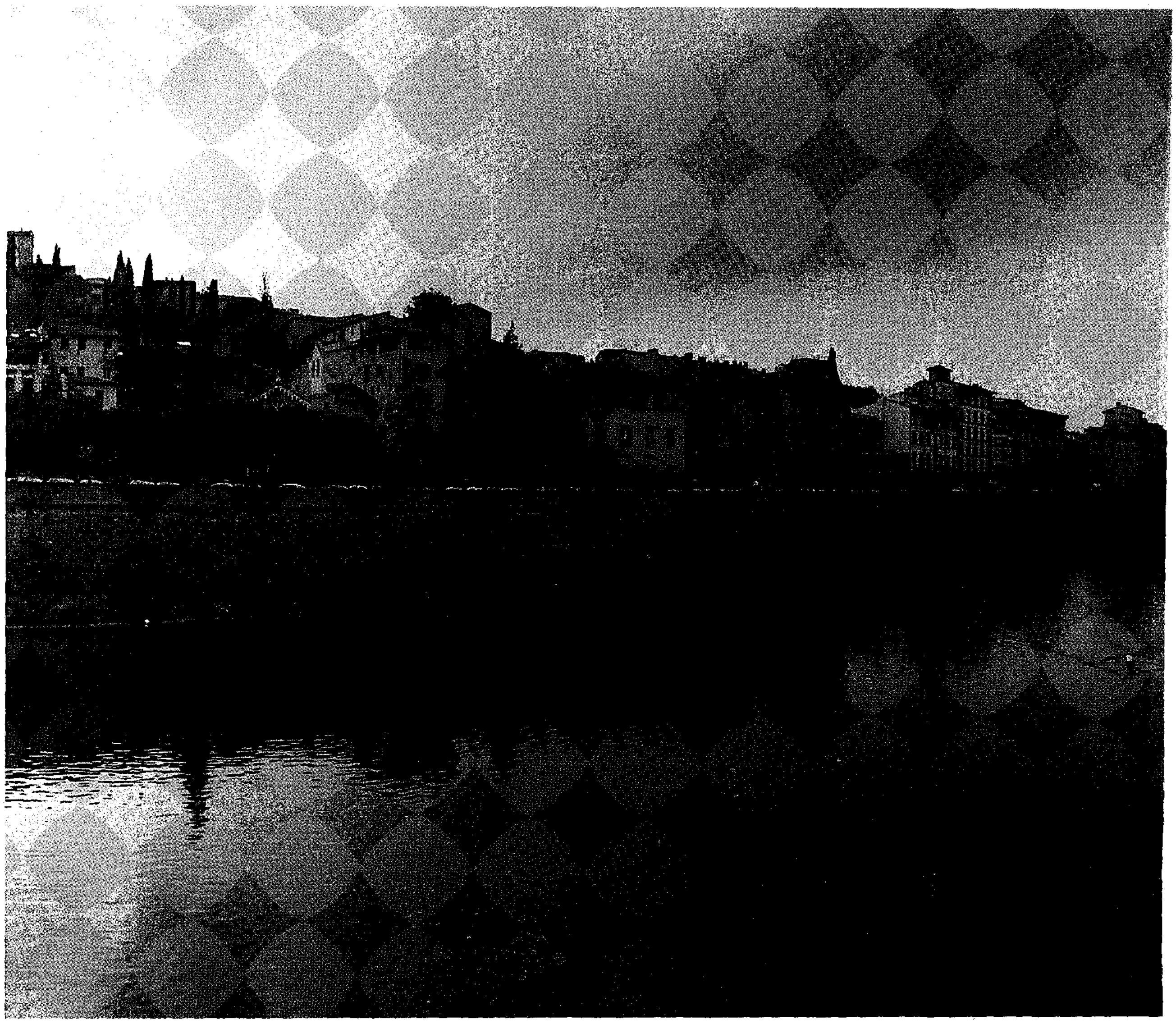

STONES OF LIGHT

How Florence created civilization amid catastrophe.

BY GEORGE STEINER

TRY it on a late-fall or winter afternoon under flogging rain. Public transportation is on strike. The Arno is a pale-ochre thread between mud banks, but there hangs over it, and in the dank alleyways, a faintly macabre odor, as if the devastating flood of November, 1966, were still sloshing, just under the pavement. Japanese tourists, in plastic rain capes painfully too thin, their eyes blank with respectful exhaustion, eddy from piazza to piazza. The chirping of the guides goes adrift in the raw winds from the Tuscan heights. And yet the magic is there: the compaction, within mean or overcrowded spaces, of magnificence; the interiors that overwhelm—the Sassetti Chapel in Santa Trinita, above the cool arches of the cloister of San Lorenzo, Santa Maria del Carmine. (The Masaccios and Masolinos in the Brancacci Chapel have been triumphantly restored.) One has walked and walked that city a hundred times over. It is obstinately new. I had long missed the dazzling façade of the house of Bianca Cappello, in Via Maggio; the lozenge-encrusted walls of the Fortezza da Basso; and that archaic vestige the Torre della Pagliazza, in Piazza Santa Elisabetta. And how many of us can claim to know—to have taken adequate time with—the Uffizi Gallery's teeming treasures, the Palazzo Pitti, or the stunning frescoes of the Medici-Riccardi?

Still, Florence exceeds its masterpieces. There is about this city, frequently morose, even harsh, a mystery of implosion, as if singular forces of intellect and feeling had been compelled into fruitful collision by the ring of hills, by a climate susceptible of white heat and bone-jarring cold. *Genius* and civic ferocity—Florence was, time and again, thrust to the edge of ruin by internecine and partisan hatreds, by almost casual resort to banishment and murder—were intimately meshed. In "Florence: A Portrait" (Harvard; $35)

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Michael Levey characterizes the fourteenth century as one of nearly unremitting crisis. He qualifies its urban politics as "proto-Fascist." Nevertheless, out of catastrophe sprang energies that have, in essence, come close to defining Western civilization. Take away the arts from Giotto to Michelangelo, and what is left astonishes. Our mathematical and natural sciences follow on Galileo, our theories of power and the state on Machiavelli. As the millennium limps to a close, it does look more and more as if the foremost poetic intelligence—the preëminent act of shaping thought and philosophy in the Western legacy—were Dante's. There are arrogant continents that have contributed less to man than this one small city.

Levey's portrayal is that of an eminent art historian elegantly at home in painting, sculpture, and architecture. Ideally, one would want to carry with one this cicerone when visiting the Loggia of the Bigallo, the Duomo, or Santa Maria Novella. But its sumptuous format and its weight make that impossible. The fact that "Florence" is part history, part aesthetic analysis, and part guidebook attaches a certain ambiguity to the whole project. Levey is at his best when he is analyzing particular masters and particular sites. We follow step by step the ripening genius of Ghiberti and Brunelleschi, both unknown and only in their mid-twenties at the time the Baptistery doors were commissioned. Masolino, so often overshadowed by Masaccio, comes fully into his own. It is fascinating to accompany Levey as he traces the achievements of Bernardo Buontalenti, first at the Casino Mediceo, then in the designs for the façade of the Duomo, then at the Fortezza del Belvedere. Increasingly theatrical and spacious, Buontalenti's style will lead to the façade and staircase of Santa Trinita and to the theatre and the Tribuna of the Uffizi.

Discussing Botticelli, Levey brings the darkening climate of Florentine politics during the eclipse of the Medici to bear on the supreme altarpiece in Santo Spirito:

> The content and emotional charge of Botticelli's religious paintings are almost disturbingly many-layered and deep, reflecting not just a sophisticated society but the sophistication and the profound thought of their creator, always refining and reworking—chiefly, one is bound to feel, to meet the needs of his own vision and the pressures of a temperament as individualis-

tic as Leonardo's. His increasingly anti-naturalistic style is the ultimate assertion—a remarkably brave one by the early sixteenth century—of individuality.

Or take the reading of Bronzino's frescoes in Eleonora di Toledo's chapel, in the Palazzo Vecchio. I had always found it overcrowded. Not so, Levey instructs. "The sense of 'infinite riches in a little room' " is arrived at by a willed tension between beauty and piety. So oblique is Bronzino's attitude toward his sacred subjects that beauty and technical virtuosity take almost illicit precedence: "The very colours of the draperies, wrapped at times about bodies of pale, silky flesh, possess a greater intensity, a deeper 'reality,' than any of the incidents illustrated. As a '*camera picta*,' the chapel has total perfection: it is literally finished, to the highest degree."

In his treatment of the Medici chapel, however, Levey rather fails us, though he rightly emphasizes that there was nothing anywhere in Europe (indeed, one would urge, anywhere) that was truly comparable. The statuary remains only an incomplete realization of what was intended. The empty niches "possess a shuttered and desolate severity." The almost numbing austerity of the all-embracing gray-and-white setting "would have been softened by the design and colour of decorative frescoes." As so often with Michelangelo, it is the immensity of the incomplete which overpowers, which holds one's attention both mesmerized and disturbed. Levey puts it finely: "We are in a tomb-chamber as alien, in its way, as any ancient Egyptian one, but in an idiom that is like a dream of imperial, classical Rome." There is a "mortal chill" strangely at odds with the titanic carnality of the reclining figures. These are, as Levey says, "elemental." But what of his judgment that the men are "as overt in their virility as the women are feminine"? It seems to me that in ways profoundly characteristic of Michelangelo's polymorphic vision—a vision set out in opaque magnificence in his poems—the hybrid, nearly androgynous quality of these statues is what generates their troubling intensity. The women, in particular, appear to emerge from some tenebrous, organic lineaments still rooted, as it were, in a creation immemorially prior to gender. In turn, a subtle, perhaps archaic, femininity can be discerned in the countenance of Lorenzo, Duke of Urbino. Death itself belongs to neither of the sexes and to both.

The book has, as a bonus, a masterly survey of post-Renaissance Florence, of the treasures produced during the city's long decline. Levey is among our most penetrating connoisseurs of Mannerism and the baroque. His references to the Sanctuary and High Altar in Santa Maria Maddalena dei Pazzi (those Tuscan names!) make me want to hurry back, and so does his argument for some of the more baroque configurations, such as Benzi's Reliquary of St. Alexis, in the Treasury of San Lorenzo. The close of the seventeenth century and the early decades of the eighteenth come to vivid presence in Levey's delight in artists such as Foggini, Marcellini, and Girolamo Ticciati. Along with, I venture, most other tourists, I have missed out altogether on the splendors of the Ospedale di San Giovanni di Dio, in Borgo Ognissanti, and on Foggini's bizarrely tormented Relief of the Apotheosis of St. Andrew Corsini—surely it ought to have been a happy occasion—in Santa Maria del Carmine. Levey's loving, erudite tour ends with the onion cupolas of the Russian Orthodox church, consecrated in 1903.

WHAT is missing, save for a few perfunctory remarks, is music. To omit music from a rendezvous with the genius of Florence is a distortion. The madrigal flourished. Marco da Gagliano, Giulio Caccini, and Emilio de' Cavalieri were associated with the Medici court. Polyphony rang out in the sonorous architectural spaces that Levey describes. During Carnival, distinctive Florentine songs and instrumental fanfares filled the streets. Opera, that most extravagant of human necessities, originated largely in Florence during the fifteen-nineties. The stellar wedding of Maria de' Medici and Henri IV of France, in October, 1600, featured three "dramas in music" that are at the very source of the genre. Peri, Cavalieri, and Caccini are (with Monteverdi) the pioneers. The role of music in the Florentine sensibility, moreover, reaches beyond individual and formal achievements. Neoplatonism, that attempt to revive and enact Plato's idealistic philosophy and aspirations to rational beauty, inspired the art and thought of the Medici world. In this renascence, Pythagorean-Platonic invocations of music, of the musically based harmony of the cosmos, were, if the word is allowed, instrumental. Botticelli's manner of motion is profoundly musical. Music as the bridge between the sciences and the humanities, between mathematics and philosophical discourse, is vital to Galileo and Leonardo. Via dance and allegory, and at the court, in the home, and on the street, musical performance gave to the glory of Florence a particular unison. In a twentieth-century master such as Dallapiccola, that legacy, with its incisive counterpoint between theory and practice, continues.

As one visits this princely city, a dilemma characteristic of postwar Europe is unavoidably insistent. The tourist trade has become the bread and wine of economic survival. Without it, the palaces would wither, the galleries go to dust, the basilicas empty. Only more and more tourists can provide the funds so desperately needed for conservation and restoration. Incoming buses choke the approaches. Legions of sightseers jostle for entrance to the Fra Angelicos in San Marco—a venue built, incomparably, for silence. Bleepers (the do-it-yourself tour) crackle in the Brancacci and Medici chapels. Fast food, and souvenirs more and more garish, tide around Michelangelo. I have seen the Piazza della Signoria flowering with garbage. It is as if the lashing maledictions that Dante and Savonarola pronounced on their loved-and-hated city were bearing plastic fruit. Yet what alternative is there? Who has the right to deny to anyone else this treasury of the spirit? And I do know of a tranquil garden, with a fountain silent as time, apparently undiscovered by the passing cavalcade. No information forthcoming. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

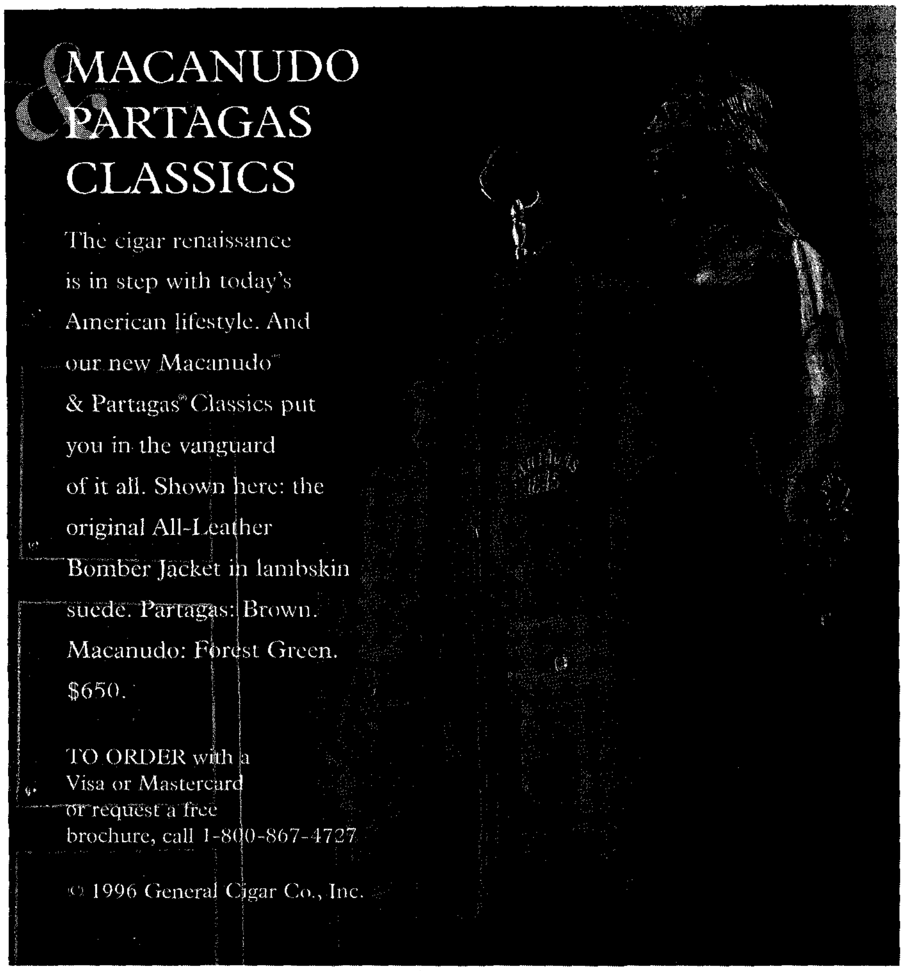
THE YELLOW ADMIRAL, by Patrick O'Brian (Norton; $24). A spectre is haunting Patrick O'Brian's Europe—the spectre of peace. As their careers have advanced and their children have grown, Captain Jack Aubrey and Stephen Maturin have battered Napoleon's ships and thwarted his spies, but here, at last, the Emperor is Elba-bound, and our heroes are left high and dry. Aubrey, ashore at half pay and with scant hope of promotion, prays that peace may not last long—a sentiment doubtless shared by O'Brian's readers. Still, Elba is not St. Helena, so war will surely return, if only for a short finale: that's when we'll meet our Waterloo.

JACOB THE LIAR, by Jurek Becker; translated from the German by Leila Vennewitz (Arcade; $21.95). In this recently translated 1969 novel, an unnamed Jewish ghetto becomes a breeding ground for rumor during the Second World War, when Jacob Heym—a café owner formerly known for his pancakes—overhears a radio broadcast announcing Allied encroachment. He instantly becomes the community's informant and morale booster, fabricating reports of the Red Army's impending arrival—information supposedly acquired via secret radio. Jacob is not the sole weaver of fantasy, however; the narrator, too, candidly confesses his propensity for creative storytelling, and asks us to weigh the human need for hope, in all its real and imagined forms, against probable annihilation.

THE DEVIL KNOWS HOW TO RIDE: THE TRUE STORY OF WILLIAM CLARKE QUANTRILL AND HIS CONFEDERATE RAIDERS, by Edward E. Leslie (Random House; $30). This anecdotal biography sifts through the legends about one of the most notorious of the guerrilla fighters who turned western Missouri and eastern Kansas in the eighteen-sixties into something like Bosnia in the nineteen-nineties. Quantrill, a drifter, an excellent shot, and a fine horseman, eluded capture until after the South's surrender, when he was killed by gunfire at the age of twenty-seven. He was a seductive criminal, who thought of himself as an officer and a gentleman, and considered his atrocities acts of war. The James brothers were among his followers.

DOING BATTLE, by Paul Fussell (Little, Brown; $24.95). For many years, Fussell has had the reputation of being a caustic critic of prevailing idiocies. In this memoir he tries to describe how the person he calls Boy Fussell turned into an angry man. The critical moment came when he found himself at dawn, after his first experience of battle, surrounded by dead young German soldiers: "To transform silly conscripts into cold marble after passing them through unbearable humiliation and fear seemed to do them an interesting injustice."

IMMORTELLES: MEMOIR OF A WILL-O'-THE-WISP, by Mireille Marokvia (MacMurray & Beck; $17.50). These childhood memories of rural France in the early decades of this century insidiously take over the reader's imagination, making palpable the presence of a vanished world. The author's grandparents were farmers and artisans, and her father was a teacher, so she grew up learning two kinds of cultivation—of the soil and of the mind. The book dexterously blends public and private, recalling, for example, how the First World War affected the daily life of a small girl in a small town.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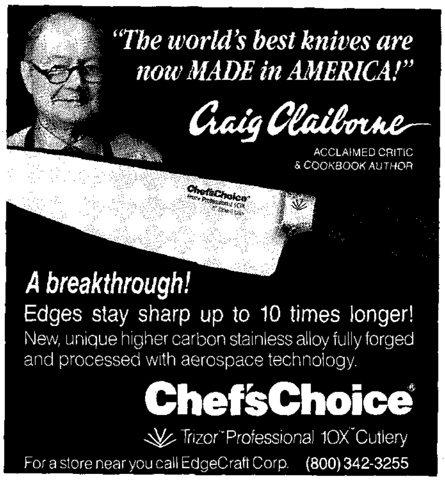
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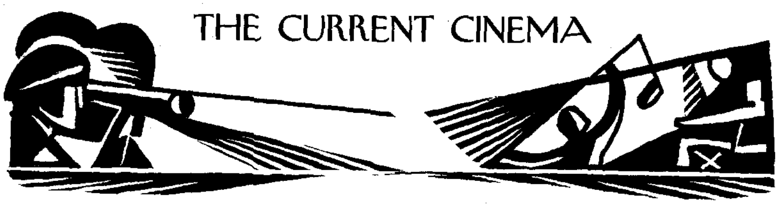
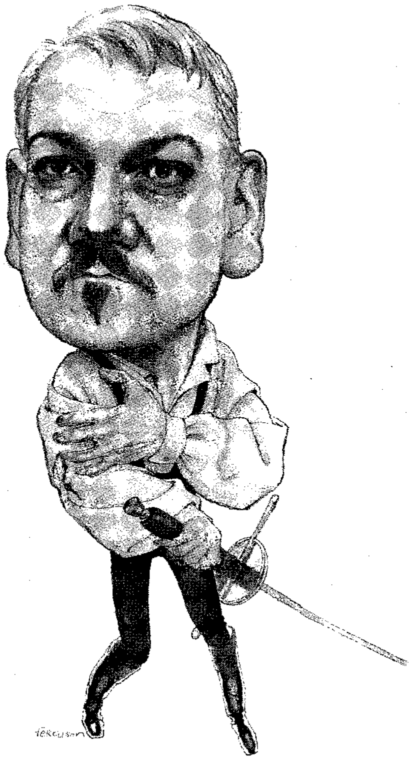


SOLID FLESH

The Prince of Denmark, and the king of sleaze.

BY TERRENCE RAFFERTY

KENNETH BRANAGH'S "Hamlet" is as bold as its hero is, famously, irresolute. There's nothing sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought about *this* production. It's the first movie "Hamlet" that has dared to play the full text (i.e., the First Folio plus bits of the Second Quarto) of Shakespeare's most richly ambiguous tragedy; the running time is nearly four hours. And the visual style is equally ambitious: the picture has been filmed in 70 mm., on gigantic, ornate sets and in the imposing grounds of Blenheim Palace. The best previous English-language film version was Laurence Olivier's, in 1948, which took a far more austere approach: Olivier cut the text severely, shot in black-and-white, and produced a beautiful, spectral abstraction of the play. Somewhat defensively, he called his pared-down rendering "a study in 'Hamlet.' " Branagh's "Hamlet" is no study: this is the huge, unwieldy thing itself, staged with exhilarating clarity and force.



Noble in reason:
Kenneth Branagh as Hamlet.

The gargantuan scale of the production is, of course, partly intended to seduce the uninitiated with action, color, and spectacle. There's a similar popularizing impulse behind the casting of movie stars—Jack Lemmon, Gérard Depardieu, Charlton Heston, Billy Crystal, and Robin Williams—in small roles. And Branagh's direction rarely passes up an opportunity for a big visual effect: when the ghost of Hamlet's murdered father appears to him, the smoke and flames of Hell erupt from beneath the ground; after the murder of Polonius, a dizzying overhead shot shows us a great dark pool of blood; in the climactic scene, Hamlet's sword flies through the air, in closeup, and lodges in Claudius's back; when Fortinbras's soldiers invade Elsinore, they burst through doors of mirrored glass. Viewers who consider themselves sophisticated may be put off by the stunt casting or by the brazen coups de théâtre or simply by the director's obvious eagerness to please every segment of the audience; they may even mistake Branagh's intelligent showmanship for vulgarity. But those of us who are thoroughly familiar with the play aren't necessarily an ideal audience, because for us the virtues of a new production can be drowned out by the static of helpless connoisseurship.

This production, despite its flash and occasional grandiosity, is entirely innocent of intellectual posturing. In every important respect, it's nakedly traditional: it exposes itself to the most pitiless kind of comparative scrutiny. Branagh's approach to "Hamlet" is audaciously straightforward: in each scene, his aim is to make literal, material sense of the play's complex action and of the characters' often confused motivations. For a practical man of the theatre like Branagh, the real challenge of "Hamlet" isn't to explicate the play but merely to *perform* it, in such a way that its maddening, stop-and-start narrative maintains some semblance of momentum and in such a way that Shakespeare's dangerously unstable mixture of violence, metaphysics, morbid lyricism, and bitter wit doesn't explode in the spectator's face. The critic Kenneth Tynan once argued that "Hamlet" is fundamentally unplayable: "It is too long, and its length is spun out of frayed and trailing nerve-ends, growing wispier, as time passes, and less relevant." He conceded, however, that the tragedy's "very complications tempt us to act it and make physical sense of its contrariness."

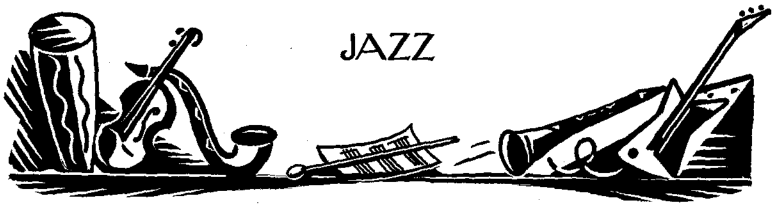
Branagh yields to that temptation enthusiastically, with the wholehearted intensity of someone who doesn't know that his task is impossible. Maybe it isn't, after all. In this "Hamlet," Branagh himself plays the unhappy Prince, and so lucidly that every shift in the volatile character's mood seems perfectly natural. He's a startlingly normal Hamlet: neither a madman nor a neurotic, self-absorbed egghead. This likable, regular-guy interpretation could perhaps be seen as a concession to a movie audience's desire for a hero it can identify with. But a full-length production, which attenuates almost unendurably the suspense generated by the hero's inability to consummate his revenge on his father's murderer, requires a Hamlet who isn't narrowly conceived—whose reluctance to act can't be dismissed as clinical insanity, cowardly rationalization, or foppish intellectual fastidiousness. The beauty of Branagh's performance is that it demonstrates an extraordinarily sympathetic awareness of how *reasonable* Hamlet's scruples are. If "Hamlet" is (among other things) the greatest revenge tragedy ever written, it is surely because in the hero's agonized deliberation we feel the full, awful weight of even the most justifiable act of murder. Branagh shows us a man who takes death very seriously, and who knows, besides, that to be designated its agent is to inherit a responsibility too large and too terrible for human reason to bear.

This is one of those revelatory Hamlets in which the actor's own best qualities merge with the strengths and weaknesses of the character and draw them together in an unexpected unity. Branagh has played the role before—on the stage, in 1988 and 1992, and in a radio production, which he co-directed, in 1992. A lot of actors give "Hamlet" one shot, put it on their résumés, and then abandon it forever, but Branagh, clearly, is determined to get it right. The honesty and dogged intelligence that fuel this impulse, and inform the whole movie, are also qualities that suit the character surprisingly well: what makes this Hamlet tragic (and appealing) is that he's so rigorous in evaluating both his bleak circumstances and his contradictory thoughts and actions.

That exacting spirit is the dominant characteristic of Branagh's "Hamlet," the source of its power and its grace. It can be felt in the acting style of the company, which is distinguished by an unusual dedication to emotional realism and narrative intelligibility. A few of the actors don't seem entirely comfortable—Michael Maloney, as Laertes, is particularly bad—but those who do respond to Branagh's forthright approach give remarkable performances. Richard Briers, a youngish Polonius, natters but refrains from doddering, and refreshes this often tiresome role with a welcome touch of the sinister. Nicholas Farrell, who plays Horatio, manages to be appropriately steadfast without being deadly dull. Derek Jacobi, as Claudius, applies his formidable Shakespearean technique to the creation of a memorable villain: a charming, superficially impressive man who does evil in order to conceal the weakness of his soul. And, as Gertrude, Julie Christie, who has never played Shakespeare, matches Jacobi's intricate effects with her own haunted simplicity: her Queen is sensuous, vain, shallow, and extremely moving.

Branagh's "Hamlet" should prove beyond doubt that this tragedy, even at its full, unruly length, is anything but unplayable. Its meaning may be unfathomable, but good actors know enough not to play philosophical concepts anyway; their job is to play creatures of flesh and blood. Branagh attends to that job with terrific ardor and an odd humility. He surrenders to the play's mysteries and instead attacks the specific, practical problems of its baffled characters; and he persuades us, finally, that Shakespeare's intimate tragedy deserves nothing less than the grand-manner treatment it receives here—that the patient exploration of human behavior is itself an enterprise of great pitch and moment. The energy and animal vitality of Branagh's "Hamlet" actually make the play seem not less but more suggestive, because in this production action *is* meaning, and embodies mysteries deeper than any the hero's mind, or ours, can imagine.

THE pornographer Larry Flynt is probably not the sort of person that Hamlet is thinking of when he muses, "What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties," and so on, but Flynt is undeniably a piece of work. Milos Forman's "The People vs. Larry Flynt" initially presents its protagonist (played by Woody Harrelson) as a bizarre object of fun—a rogue who's hilariously unembarrassed by his own sleaziness. In the early scenes, we watch Flynt presiding over the creation of the unprecedentedly crude skin magazine *Hustler*, which in his view provides a blue-collar alternative to the upscale eroticism of *Playboy:* meat-and-potatoes sex for the working man (or, more precisely, just meat). And we see the beginnings of his relationship with a bisexual topless dancer named Althea (Courtney Love), who ultimately becomes his wife. For an hour or so, "The People vs. Larry Flynt," which was written by Scott Alexander and Larry Karaszewski, is a cheerful and unpretentious picaresque comedy (slightly marred by a trace of "only in America" condescension), but the picture turns sentimental and smugly high-minded in its second half. The focus shifts from Flynt's publishing business to his many legal battles, his physical disability (an assassination attempt left him paralyzed from the waist down), and Althea's losing struggles with drug addiction and AIDS. The filmmakers, having gone to great lengths to humanize these disreputable characters, make the mistake of trying to canonize them—Larry as a fearless point man for First Amendment freedoms, Althea as a sexually unconventional but fiercely devoted wife. Since the most attractive quality of both characters is the outrageous bluntness of their self-interest, the appearance of more conventional virtues is disappointing (and unconvincing). Like so many movies in these timid times, "The People vs. Larry Flynt" begins strongly and then loses the native hue of resolution. ♦



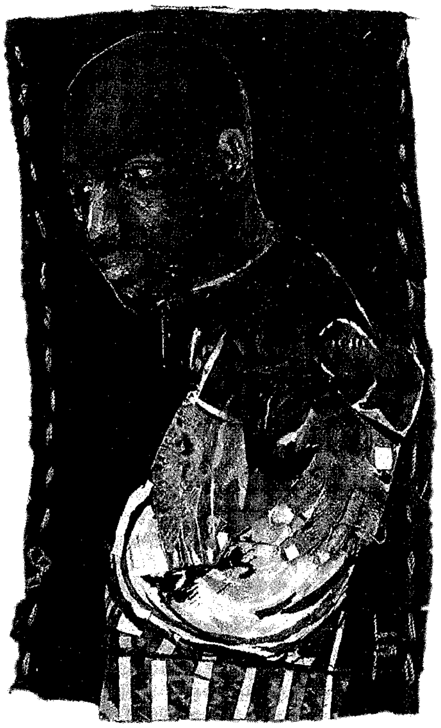
HEIR

The drummer Leon Parker comes into his own.

BY WHITNEY BALLIETT

THE jazz drum set, having evolved slowly during the past sixty years, generally contains a snare drum, several tomtoms, a bass drum, a high hat, and two or three cymbals. But the fearless thirty-one-year-old drummer Leon Parker began stripping his drums in the late eighties. "I wanted an instrument that was transportable, something I could get close to," he has said. "Also, I had gotten turned off by the huge sets the rock drummers use. Who needs ten cymbals and ten drums? I started experimenting. First, I took away the tomtoms, then the high hat, then the bass drum, then all but one cymbal. I used a three-inch snare drum, and I put top skins on both sides. When I worked with Kenny Barron, I used just a ride cymbal, that's all. It became my minimalist concept, and I was committed." Nowadays, his set usually consists of a three-inch snare; a floor tomtom tipped on its side and equipped with legs, a foot pedal, and a cowbell; and a thin, eighteen-inch, hand-hammered, flattop ride cymbal. He also uses wire brushes and amazingly light parade-size drumsticks.

Unwittingly, Parker the progressive has gone back to the drums used in the thirties and forties by the pioneer New Orleans drummer Baby Dodds—a snare, a bass drum, a cowbell, a wood block, and one cymbal. The alto saxophonist, clarinettist, and jazz scholar Bob Wilber worked with Dodds in the late forties, and he once said of him, "He was a percussionist more than a drummer. He thought of drums in terms of colors and how to mix them. He was fanatical about tuning his drums, and he'd be on the stand a half hour before showtime, tightening and tapping, tightening and tapping. His time was superb, and his whole playing was heavy and low. The tonality was down where it didn't get in the way, as so much modern drumming does. He principally used his bass drum and powerful, accented press rolls on his snare drum, and he didn't have a high hat. But he had a ride cymbal, and he played it in a way that young drummers think they invented—just four beats to the bar, *ting-ting-ting-ting*, his head down low, and his right arm crooked like a dancer's over his head and the cymbal, and his whole body shimmying and shaking in time to the music. It was an unbelievable experience to have Baby behind you." The exceptional pianist Bill Charlap says much the same of Parker: "He gets many different colors, and he's got brilliant time. Many drummers just don't groove; they lack that intensity in their beat. But Leon's got real pop to his time. Wham! And his sense of intricate rhythms never gets in the way of his grooving."



Parker: Getting close to his drum set.

Parker was born in White Plains, New York, into a "big, complicated" family made up of blacks, Native Americans, and, a ways back, whites. His father works in the town's post office, and his mother is a social worker in a local nursery school. He began "beating on things at the age of three," and by the time he was in his teens he was working informally with a drummer named Ray White. He was also a drummer in a black band that played for black people all over Westchester County and into Connecticut. "We played every kind of music for weddings and dances and parties," Parker said recently. "We were there to make people happy. I loved it. It was where I got my foundation, the social connection." Parker didn't start coming to New York until he was eighteen, because, like many suburbanites, he was leery of the city. Fordham offered him a scholarship, but he decided he wanted to stay in music. At first, he hung around the alto saxophonist Arnie Lawrence, who was teaching at the New School. Then he started jamming at Augie's, on upper Broadway, with the alto saxophonist Jesse Davis and the pianist and organist Larry Goldings. ("I got him going on the organ," Parker has said of Goldings.) He met his wife, Lisa, at Augie's (they have a six-year-old daughter named Evandrea), and they went to Europe for eight months and performed on the street in France and Portugal and Spain. Lisa played an Indian flute and Parker an African drum, and they made things out of seashells and sold them. Back in New York, he appeared at the old Village Gate with Goldings and Charlap, with the bassists Sean Smith, Ed Howard, and Larry Grenadier, and with the pianist Bruce Barth. "I had my first group, Square Root, at the Gate with Sean Smith, Bill Charlap, and the alto saxophonist Allen Mezquida," Parker has said. "The bassist Harvie Swartz introduced me to Kenny Barron, and I worked with him, and Joshua Redman introduced me to his father, Dewey, and I played with him. I think a lot of the younger musicians engage in false worship. They should be studying the classic *living* players like Barron and Dewey Redman and Jimmy Heath and Tom Harrell and Roy Haynes. Roy Haynes is my man. I first heard him when I was eleven, and I knew that was it. He should be playing solo at Lincoln Center. He should be knighted and get one of those genius awards. He must wake up every day and just grow and grow."

UNDISTRACTED by the impulse to move constantly around a full drum set and dilute his rhythmic patterns, Parker concentrates on his snare and its rims, on his tomtom bass drum, and on his ride cymbal. He can be ferocious and as soft as silk. He uses rim shots (hitting the snare skin and the snare rim at the same time), which, lamentably, went out of fashion with Buddy Rich and Jo Jones, and he develops rhythmic combinations on his ride cymbal—*dot de-da, dot de-da, dot dot de-da, de-da de-da dot dot de-da*—that rise to shimmering crashes, then subside to whispers. He constantly mixes his wire brushes and his sticks, sometimes using a wire brush in his left hand and shushing it across his snare on two and four so that it sounds like a high hat, and a stick in his right hand for his ride-cymbal strokes and for occasional accents on his snare and his tomtom bass drum. Most drum solos, bereft of thought and logic and color, are simply displays of technique, random bursts of thunder and lightning. Parker's solos, relatively short, are improvisations on certain chosen patterns. He will start with heavy, irregularly spaced beats on his snare but with the snares released so that the drum becomes a tomtom. He will break these beats with an occasional rim shot, then slide onto his snare rims, issuing a fusillade of *tick-tick-tick-ticks*, all the while using half-time beats on his bass drum. He will go at his ride cymbal, holding his right-hand stick vertically and hitting its outer edge with light, skating beats, shift the stick onto the cymbal proper, and, rapidly clamping and releasing the cymbal with his left hand while steadily hitting it with his right-hand stick, create an ascending series of crashes and shimmers, drop a booming bass-drum beat, suddenly raise his sticks in the air over his head and hit them together wildly, and with a whacking rim shot end the solo.

Like Baby Dodds, Parker is also a percussionist. He will put aside his brushes and sticks, and use just his hands. He opens and closes his first CD, "Above and Below," with solos—the first eighteen seconds long and the second slightly over a minute—played on *himself* with his hands, clapping, slapping, pummelling, and they are the high points of the disk. On his new CD, "Belief" (Columbia), he plays straight jazz drums on only three tracks, and on the rest he uses shakers, conga drums, a wood block, bells, a frame drum, an ashiko drum, a dumbek, and handclaps. He also sings eerie, wordless songs, as does the percussionist and composer Natalie Cushman. And he rarely uses 4/4 time, but frequently works out variations on 6/8 time. The trumpeter and flugelhornist Tom Harrell, who appears with great effect on two tracks on "Belief," said this about Parker recently: "His grooves are amazing. I've heard him use 3/8 on his bass drum and 4/4 on his ride cymbal at the same time. His ride-cymbal beat makes incredible propulsive swing. It's a beautiful connection playing with Leon. It's hypnotic."

Parker has a bright-penny look. He also has a slight Napoleonic cast. He is small, genial, compact, bald, and a fast, persuasive talker who laughs explosively. "I was losing my hair," he said the other day, "and, since it's now fashionable for young men of color to be bald, I took the rest off. Anyway, perhaps I aspire to be a monk, an actor, a world-music messenger. My career has been a solitary journey. I want to be empowered to do what I feel about jazz. I'm broadening the audience for the music. I'm bringing kids into my arena, and they're listening. I stand up for the musical truth. I've always been ready for something, and now I'm starting to come into it."

ONE night, after hearing Parker at Bradley's, I asked him if he had ever heard Sid Catlett, the greatest of jazz drummers. (Catlett died, aged only forty-one, in 1951, just as the LP era was beginning. He would have continued to change jazz drumming, as his peer Jo Jones did.) Parker said that he hadn't heard Catlett; in fact, he had him mixed up in his head with Baby Dodds. I invited Parker to stop by my apartment the next day, and I played two famous Catlett solos for him. Recorded in the fall of 1947 at Symphony Hall, in Boston, when Catlett was with Louis Armstrong's All-Stars, these solos are wonders of melodic drumming, still fresh, still ahead of their time. Parker was wowed by them, particularly by the way Catlett mysteriously hits—left-right, right-left—one stick on the other on the snare head in a blinding succession of clicks; by his playing a simple beat on the rim of a tomtom that swings so hard you want to shout; and by his rumbelaying back and forth between his snare and his tomtom and making pure melody. Parker understood Catlett immediately. Maybe he knew that he had already begun to move in the Master's footsteps. ◆

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BY CALVIN TRILLIN

"IT'S all over," Harry said when I saw him recently in a Lower Manhattan café that we both frequent. "There are no more secrets. We might as well pack it in."

"Are you talking about these guys at the C.I.A. and the F.B.I. selling secrets to the Russians?" I asked.

"No, no," Harry said, "not the C.I.A. and the F.B.I. The bus-stop signs. I heard on the radio that the city is going to put up three thousand new bus-stop signs. Color-coded. Now any yahoo is going to know just which bus stops where. This is not the city it once was, my friend."

Harry, who was born and brought up not far from the café, is remarkably open about something that few of his neighbors would acknowledge: native New Yorkers hate the idea of out-of-towners being able to find their way around the city.

Why do they feel that way? Maybe, given the fact that New York moves at a pace that can keep even the savviest city-dweller uncertain of his footing, natives have had to find comfort in the thought of some people being totally lost. Maybe native New Yorkers are what English out-of-towners call bloody-minded.

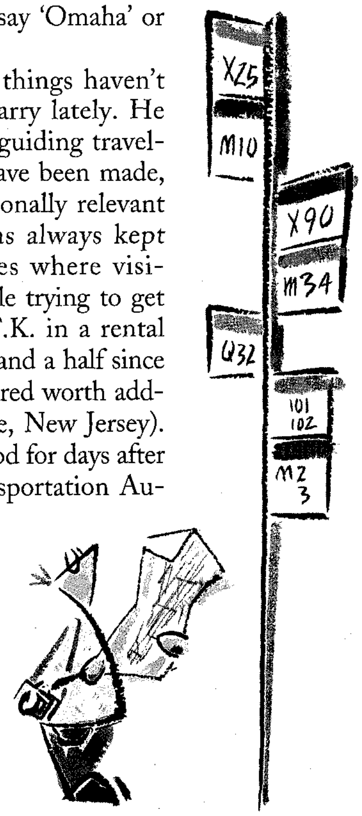
Whatever the cause, Harry puts great store in municipal bafflement. Once, when I was feeling frustrated with the system used to designate subway routes, I mentioned to him that the R and the N trains—which sound from their letters as if they operate two or three boroughs apart—actually stop at more or less the same places.

"Right!" he said, beaming. "But that's not the beauty part. The beauty part is that depending on the time of day, the B train goes to two completely different places. You could get on thinking you're on your way to Roosevelt Island and get off at 168th and Broadway, where nobody's ever *heard* of Roosevelt Island. This is not a town with codes that can be cracked by the first yokel who wanders in, my friend."

I've seen Harry swell with pride like that once or twice since. When occasional intersections in New York—chosen, as far as I could tell, for no particular reason—sprouted signs with an arrow pointing vaguely in the direction of the Javits Convention Center, Harry was ecstatic. "Have you seen those?" he asked me. "There you are, deep in Washington Heights, a hundred one-way streets from nowhere, and you see an arrow saying that if you go down that street you'll get to the Convention Center. And that's the last sign you'll see for miles. I mean, it might as well say 'Omaha' or 'Roanoke.' I love it."

In general, though, things haven't been going well for Harry lately. He suspects that the signs guiding travellers from the airports have been made, as he puts it, "conventionally relevant to the journey": he has always kept a list of unlikely places where visitors have ended up while trying to get to Manhattan from J.F.K. in a rental car, and it's been a year and a half since he heard one he considered worth adding to the list (Fort Lee, New Jersey).

He was in a dark mood for days after the Metropolitan Transportation Authority ended its policy of posting maps of the subway system only inside the trains. When large maps began to appear on subway platforms, Harry just shook his head and sighed at the thought that someone unfamiliar with the route would no longer have to board a train and fight his way over to decipher a map similar in design to spaghetti primavera only to find out that he was going at breakneck speed in the wrong direction.



Harry was also deeply opposed to a decision the Department of Transportation made to add signs saying "Sixth Avenue" to what New Yorkers had never been able to bring themselves to call "Avenue of the Americas." Before then, he could brighten up a gray afternoon by standing on Sixth Avenue waiting to be asked where Sixth Avenue was.

Hearing the bad news about the bus-stop signs, I tried my best to cheer Harry up. "Just about all subway stations that have multiple exits still won't say which street each exit leads to," I said. "There are tourists wandering around in the rain out there, Harry."

"True," Harry acknowledged, "that's true."

"And the announcements over the subway public-address system remain unintelligible, Harry. I met an out-of-towner the other day who thought that for some reason they were being delivered in Turkish."

Harry seemed to brighten a bit. "You know," he said, "I was thinking for a while there of leaving the city."

"What stopped you?" I said.

"I can't find my way around anywhere else." ♦

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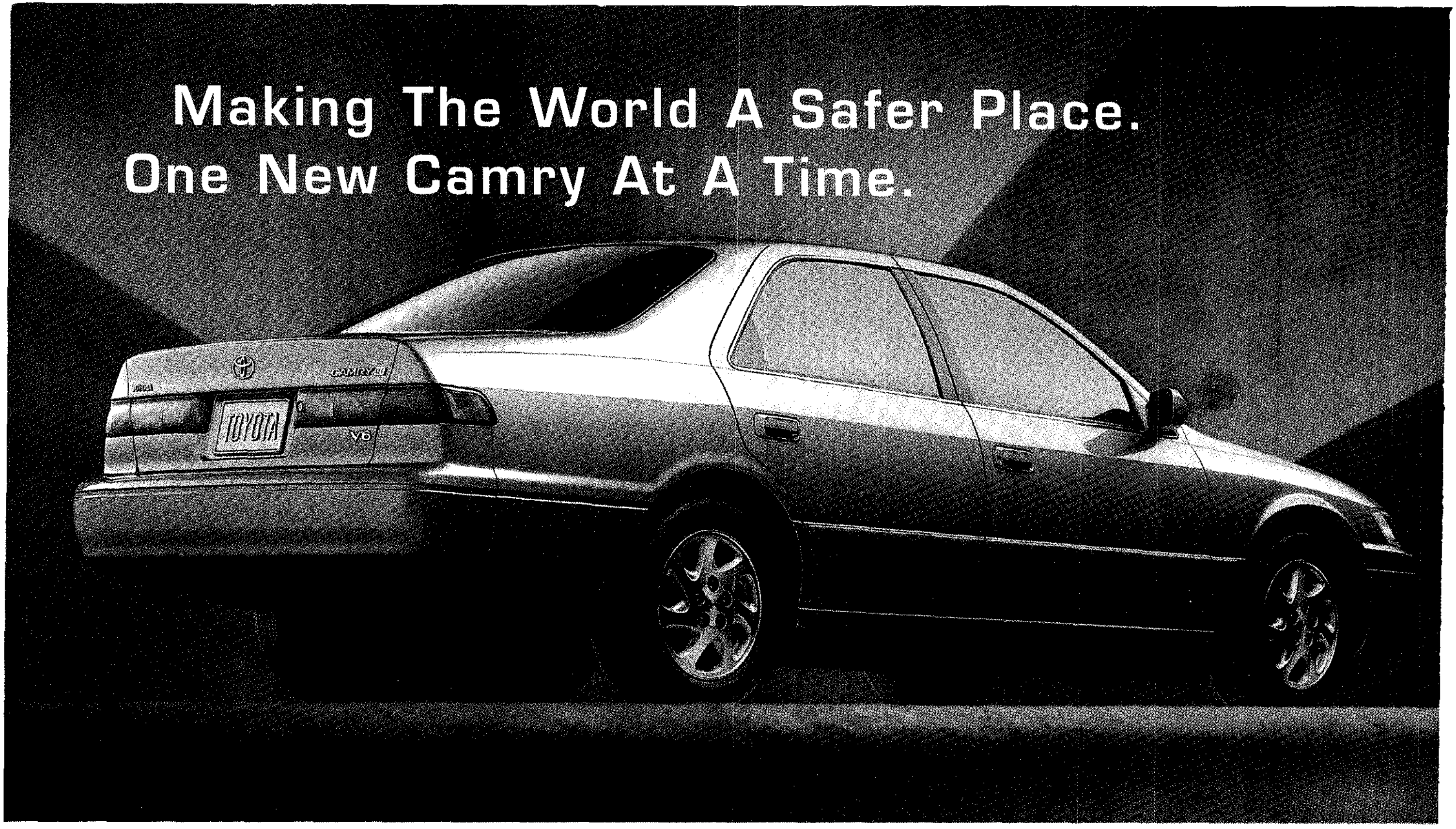

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